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THE DANTE TRADITION IN THE
FOURTEENTH AND FIFTEENTH
CENTURIES

By RALPH HAYWARD KENISTON

PREFACE

This work does not propose to make any great contribution to Dante scholarship ; it is an attempt to present to English readers the traditional ideas about Dante in the first two centuries after his death. Two Italian compilers, Papanti and Solerti, have made the task easy — indeed without their work the study would have been hardly possible for an American without access to early manuscripts. Where I have found suitable translations available, I have not scrupled to employ them ; to Wicksteed in particular I am indebted. For the most part, I have been unable to supplement the studies of Papanti and of Köhler on the sources ; in a few cases I believe I am the first to call attention to possible parallels. Such of the work as concerns the justification for traditional beliefs as found in Dante's works is my own, although even here Dr. Moore has touched on a part of the field. The value of the essay, if any it has, is for those whose love for Dante the poet inspires them with interest in Dante the man.

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THE DANTE TRADITION IN THE FOURTEENTH AND FIFTEENTH CENTURIES

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

Around the names of those who have stood out in the life of their day and generation, there seems to linger even in death something of that magnetic power which once made them leaders of men, — a power that may sometimes associate with their memories words or deeds little consonant with the character of the real man but that also preserves many a distinctive trait. Such a group of tales and anecdotes — some resting on a basis of fact, others attracted from varied sources to the commanding personality — soon develops into a tradition, widespread and insistent. This tradition may be oral or literary; it may be both, finding its origin in either form. If it is purely oral, it may eventually so expand with each new telling as to become a legend. For some centuries since, hardy spirits have been putting forward this accretive theory to explain the Christ "legend," and in the mediæval conception of Virgil we have an excellent example of such a growth.¹ Often the oral tradition persists in spite of known facts — just as to-day so many scandals enjoy an oral existence quite beyond their deserts. Occasionally a tradition is limited to literature — if we still call this tradition — handed on from plagiarist to plagiarist. But by far the most frequent condition is to find the literary and the oral going hand in hand.

There can be no universal touchstone to test the nature of oral tradition; we can argue only from analogy or from the phases which find their way into literature. But we may draw certain general conclusions

¹ Cf. D. Comparetti, *Virgilio nel Medio Evo*, 2d ed. Florence, 1896.

regarding its development. It is evident that when a given story is once fixed in writing its growth is stunted, unless there chances to hit upon it some imitator whose chief literary device is hyperbole. The Middle Ages were untrammelled by easily accessible books; the fancy had room for free play. Then every tradition assumed legendary details. But the invention of the printing press toward the middle of the fifteenth century marked the end of all far-reaching, popular legend. Circumspect traditions continued to persist, and here and there in some out-of-the-way community a local legend survived, a prey for the modern student of folklore. For the old, fantastic superstitions, the Renaissance, with its spread of learning and disillusionment among all classes, had little sympathy, and the legendary movement ceased.

For several decades it has been customary to speak of the various tales and anecdotes which gather about the name of Dante as forming a "Dante legend."¹ But such a description is hardly more accurate than to call the collection of homely jests attached to Lincoln's name a legend. With one or two exceptions — and these are of palpably literary origin — all of the stories recorded of Dante are lacking in the exaggerated, fantastic details which we consider characteristic of the legend. Bartoli goes so far as to say that all of the examples which we possess are probably of literary origin,² and there is some reason to believe that this is true. But this literary tradition was of considerable importance during the first two centuries after Dante's death, including not merely anecdotes of his deeds and sayings, but also the greater part of the current ideas with regard to the poet's temperament and personality as recorded in the early biographers;³ and we cannot be wrong in supposing that, for the most part, the literary conception tallies with that in the popular mind.

If we consider the wealth of stories which have been connected during the past century with two such figures as Napoleon and Abraham Lincoln, we shall find that in general they portray the man as he is known to us from more personal and trustworthy sources. Though the actual event recorded as a chapter in their experience may have been an incident

¹ Prof. A. D'Ancona was the first, I believe, to use the expression, in his edition of the *Novelle* of Giovanni Sercambi, Bologna, 1871, p. 283.

² Cf. *Vita di D. A.*, p. 335.

³ V. Imbriani in his paper *Sulla rubrica dantesca nel Villani* (in *Studi danteschi*, Florence, 1891, p. 1), speaking of the early biographers, says, "ben presto s'accorge quasi tutto quel che se ne racconta esser favola o romanzo."

in the life of Julius Cæsar or Speaker Cannon, it is always one which is in perfect keeping with the true personality of its new hero. I have heard a score of anecdotes of P. T. Barnum, the great showman, — to choose an example from a different level, — and in every one there have stood out prominently two characteristics, — geniality and business shrewdness, qualities which would seem to be warranted by his biography. The rôle changes, but the personality of the actor is discernible in all. If, then, we find in our own time such close conformity of tradition and of fact, it is not unreasonable to believe that the anecdotes and comments of biographers which go to make up the tradition of Dante contain a picture which is not far removed from the truth.

A collection of the anecdotes which concern Dante is in itself an interesting work, for many of the tales are amusing, less have some artistic merit; but the chief value of such a marshaling of reproofs valiant and bits of gossip is the reflection they afford us of the real, human personality, of the man of flesh and blood.¹ The sources² of these oft-repeated tales are various; one group seems to rest on actual events in the poet's life; another is manifestly suggested by statements in his writings and can be considered as little more than a sprightly exercise of the tale-teller's imagination; the last, and by far the largest, class is a collection of stories, anecdotes, and retorts, some of them derived from classical authors, others drawn from the popular novelistic matter, and all related as illustrative of some personal trait. Needless to say, we are not concerned with proving whether or no some event reported by a *novelliere* occurred in Dante's life, and quite as little must we exercise our ingenuity to demonstrate that one man did or did not write a given story. It is enough that this story was related as a part of Dante's experience, that these words were placed in his mouth, for this is evidence that some individual believed that they were in keeping with his nature. If now we find that there is any considerable congruity among the tales, we have a further indication that this belief was general and amounted to a tradition. The purpose of this study is to discover, so far as we may, what was the traditional conception of Dante's character, bearing in mind that in this conception we have at least an adumbration of Dante the man.

¹ Cf. I. Del Lungo's review of Papanti in *Archivio storico italiano*, Serie terza, XVIII, 519 ff.

² In general, see the works of Papanti and Köhler cited in the Bibliography.

So far as possible, also, we may verify our conclusions from his own work, for in spite of his mediæval doctrine of self-concealment, the modern, the human, in Dante breaks away from the bonds of convention and reveals the individual.

In the investigation of the traditional ideas respecting Dante, I have limited myself to the period between his death and the close of the fifteenth century. During these years, Dante was the dominant figure of Italian literature, and his life and work was a theme not merely of literary discussion but of popular interest. Besides numerous lives or biographical notices¹—there are more than a score before 1500—the *novellieri*, with the exception of Fiorentino and Massucio Salernitano, all contribute some anecdote or other of his experience, and the earliest commentators² on the *Divina Commedia* occasionally add some gossiping bit of information. But the sixteenth century saw a decline of interest in Dante and his work; in the field of the tale, the few new stories which are told reflect only too plainly the vulgar or obscene tastes of their decadent authors; Dante has ceased to be a personality. With this foreword, we may proceed to investigate what sort of man was the Dante who survived in the tradition of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

¹ Cf. Solerti, *Le vite di Dante, Petrarca e Boccaccio*, Milan, n. d.

² Cf. Kraus, *Dante*, etc., pp. 502-522.

CHAPTER II

DANTE AMONG HIS FELLOWS

I. SOME GLIMPSES OF DANTE

Of Dante's contemporaries only one has left us any account of his life; under the rubric "Del poeta Dante e come morì," Giovanni Villani inserted in his *Cronica*¹ a brief outline of the life and works of his fellow-citizen. It is needless to remark that in his bald, impersonal narrative, covering two scanty pages, there is little suggestive of Dante the man, although the account closes with a word on his character and his claim to fame. The following generation, however, presents a number of writers, who, if too late to have come in personal contact with Dante, must at least have had friends, perhaps parents or relatives, who had once been his intimates or acquaintances. Such was Boccaccio.

Three works dealing with Dante have come down to us under Boccaccio's name: the *Vita*, the *Compendio*, and the *Comento sopra la Divina Commedia*. The question of the authenticity of the *Compendio* need not concern us here;² at least it is a document of the Trecento containing observations on the life of Dante and as such bears its part in determining the traditional ideas concerning the poet. For convenience we shall speak of it as Boccaccio's work. Scattered through these works we find numerous anecdotes, touching on details of Dante's career, which may not be authentic but which certainly are not improbable, for, as Dr. Moore has observed,³ that which is, in the strict logical sense, "not proved" is not therefore "disproved." About most of them there is a quaint flavor of gossip — the sort which some good dame perhaps

"Favoleggiava con la sua famiglia."

¹ Ed. G. Dragomanni, Florence, 1844-1845, Bk. IX, § 136 (II, 233-235); also in Solerti, pp. 3-4.

² For discussion, see the introductions of Macri-Leone and of Rostagno to their respective editions of the *Vita* and the *Compendio*, and Dr. Moore's *Dante and his Early Biographers*, pp. 4-57.

³ *Dante and his Early Biographers*, p. 169.

To this class belongs his account of Dante's first meeting with Beatrice. In a passage which in grace of style and charm of atmosphere transports us to the cloudless days of the *Decameron*, we catch our first glimpse of the boy whose life was to be so rife with storm.¹

"In that season wherein the sweetness of heaven reclothes the earth with its adornments, making her all to smile with diversity of flowers mingled amongst green leaves, it was the custom both of men and women in our city, each in his district, to hold festival, gathering together in their several companies; wherefore it chanced that Folco Portinari, amongst the rest, a man in those days much honoured of the citizens, had gathered his neighbors round about, to feast them in his house on the first day of May. Now amongst them was that Alighieri already spoken of; and thither (even as little lads are wont to go about with their fathers, especially to places of festivity) Dante, whose ninth year was not yet ended, had accompanied him. And here, mingling with the others of his age, — for in the festal house were many of them, boys and girls, — the first tables being served, he abandoned himself with the rest to children's sports, so far as the compass of his small years would extend. There was amongst the throng of young ones a little daughter of the aforesaid Folco, whose name was Bice (though he himself always called her by the original of the name, to wit, Beatrice), whose age was some eight years; right gracious after her childish fashion, and full gentle and winning in her ways, and of manners and speech far more sedate and modest than her small age required; and besides this the features of her face full delicate, most excellently disposed, and replete not only with beauty but with such purity and winsomeness, that she was held of many to be a kind of little angel. She then, such as I am painting her, or may be far more beauteous yet, appeared before the eyes of our Dante, at this festival, not I suppose for the first time, but for the first time with power to enamour him; and he, child as he still was, received her fair visage into his heart with such affection, that, from that day forth, never, so long as he lived, was he severed therefrom."

The picture is typical of the method of the prince of story-tellers; a sentence, a word starts his fertile fancy in a whirl of imagery. And so

¹ *Vita*, ed. Macri-Leone, pp. 13-15. The translation is Wicksteed's, of which I have availed myself without exception for the lives of Boccaccio and Bruni.

we recognize the theme of this story in the second chapter of the *Vita Nuova* (II, 1-25).¹

"Nine times already since my birth had the heaven of light returned to the selfsame point almost, as concerns its own revolution, when first the glorious Lady of my mind was made manifest to mine eyes; even she who was called Beatrice by many who knew not wherefore. She had already been in this life for so long as that, within her time, the starry heaven had moved toward the Eastern quarter one of the twelve parts of a degree; so that she appeared to me at the beginning of her ninth year almost, and I saw her almost at the end of my ninth year. Her dress, on that day, was of a most noble color, a subdued and goodly crimson, girdled and adorned in such sort as best suited with her very tender age. At that moment, I say most truly that the spirit of life, which hath its dwelling in the secretest chamber of the heart, began to tremble so violently that the least pulses of my body shook therewith; and in trembling it said these words: *Ecce deus fortior me, qui veniens dominabitur mihi.*"

Thus under Boccaccio's hand the vague, almost mysterious account of Dante becomes a concrete episode, bright with local color. Elsewhere² he tells us that he received the information regarding the family of Beatrice from a "trustworthy person who was an acquaintance of hers and closely connected with her by ties of blood" (*fededeegna persona, la quale la conobbe e fu per consanguinità strettissima a lei*)—a statement which inclines us to look less skeptically on the details of this version. To be sure, Lionardo Bruni says³ with some bitterness, in telling of Dante's prowess at Campaldino, "I could wish that our Boccaccio had made mention of this valor rather than his falling in love at nine years old and such like trifles, which he tells of so great a man," and Giovanni Mario Filelfo, that curious juggler of facts and fancies, goes so far as to say in his *Vita Dantis*,⁴ "I believe that that Beatrice, whom Dante is supposed to have loved, was about as much a woman as was Pandora" (*Sed ego aequae Beatricem quam amasse fingitur Dantes mulierem numquam fuisse opinor ac fuit Pandora*); but it is sometimes tempting to have

¹ Rossetti's translation, in *Dante and his Circle*.

² *Comento*, ed. Milanese, I, 224 (on *Inf.* II, 57).

³ *Vita di Dante*, in Solerti, p. 99.

⁴ In Solerti, p. 163.

faith in the substance of things not seen, particularly when it does not strain our sense of reason.

Another anecdote of Dante's acquaintance with Beatrice, marked by the same word-of-mouth quality, is recorded by the author of the *Codex Cassinese*¹ (ca. 1385) in his second gloss on the passage which relates how Dante swooned at the close of Francesca's beautiful story of Paolo's first kiss (*Inf.* V, 142).

"Observe that this incident of his falling actually happened to the author while he was in love with Beatrice. For when he had come to a banquet at which Beatrice was present and she had appeared before him as he mounted the stairs, he fell, half dead, as it were, and being carried to a couch, lay for some time unconscious."

Although Dante has not mentioned this experience in the story of his love, one naturally recalls the wedding-feast, at which he is so overcome at the sight of Beatrice that the ladies, observing his confusion, mock him,² and which may have celebrated the marriage of Beatrice to Simone de' Bardi.³

The Commentary of Benvenuto da Imola, written between 1380 and 1390, and easily the most valuable of the early commentaries in historical details, contains several brief sketches from Dante's private life which are at once interesting and suggestive.

"Ita n'è Beatrice in l'alto cielo" and Dante has entered the life of civic activity.

"In the church of San Giovanni Battista in Florence, around the baptismal font there are some cylindrical wells in the marble, just large enough to hold a man, and when the priests are baptizing children, they stand in these wells, about up to their waist, the more easily to perform this office on days when there is a throng, — for large as Florence is, it has only one baptistery, even as Bologna. . . . (Now it so happened) that one day some boys were playing around the font, as they are wont to do, and one of them, who was more reckless than the rest, got into one of these holes and became so firmly wedged in (*et ita et taliter implicavit et involvit membra sua*) that he could not be dragged out by any manner or means. And so the boys, seeing that they could not help him, began to cry out and in a few moments a great throng assembled. To make a

¹ Ed. by the Badia di Monte Cassino, 1865, p. 46. Cf. Kraus, *Dante*, p. 11.

² *Vita Nuova*, XIV, lines 15-63 (pp. 212-213).

³ Cf. Boccaccio, *Comento*, I, 224 ff.

long story short, no one could do a thing to succor the poor boy whose life was in danger; when of a sudden Dante, who was then one of the Priors in office, appeared on the scene, and seeing the boy, cried out, 'What ails ye, fools? An ax!' As soon as an ax was fetched, Dante seized it in his own hands and started to pound the marble, which broke readily enough. And thus the boy, resurrected from the dead, as it were, escaped without hurt."¹

The incident is introduced as a comment on Dante's words,

"Non mi parean meno ampi ne maggiori
Che quei che son nel mio bel San Giovanni
Fatti per loco de' battezzatori;
L'un delli quali, ancor non è molt' anni,
Rupp'io per un che dentro vi annegava:
E questo sia suggel ch'ogni uomo sganni,"

(*Inf.* XIX, 16-21)

apparently a rebuke to the worshipers of the letter rather than the spirit, whose murmurings, centuries before, had been silenced by the words, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good, or to do harm? to save a life or to destroy it?" It is not easy to explain the inconsistency between Benvenuto's expression "taliter implicavit et involvit membra sua" and Dante's "annegava." Professor Norton interprets the latter as meaning "was stifling," but this is an extension of meaning which is hardly warranted by usage, however well it accords with Benvenuto's story. Another possible solution, suggested by Professor Grandgent,² is that Dante broke open a passage from one of the wells into the main baptismal font in which the boy was drowning. Whatever may have been the exact details of the event, the story reveals Dante in a character which it is easy to overlook in our study of Dante the writer. Dante was a man of action, quick to choose the path and quick to carry out his plans.³ Perhaps it was this characteristic which secured for him in April, 1301, his appointment as superintendent in charge of the repairs on the *Via Sancti Proculi*.⁴

¹ *Comentum super Dantis Aldigherii Comœdiam*, ed. J. P. Lacaita, Florence, 1887, II, 35-36 (on *Inf.* XIX, 16); also in Papanti, pp. 34-35.

² I take this opportunity of expressing my indebtedness to Professor Grandgent for his constant inspiration and assistance.

³ Cf. Landino, *Vita e costumi di Dante* (in Solerti, p. 188): "Fu di non minore ingegno et consiglio nell'amministrazione e governo civile che nelle dottrine."

⁴ Cf. G. R. Carpenter, *Documents concerning Dante's Public Life*. (Dante Society Reports, X, 39-45, Cambridge, Mass., 1891-1892.)

Benvenuto also tells¹ an anecdote of the loss and rediscovery of the first seven cantos of the *Inferno*, which is patently derived from Boccaccio. The latter has several versions of the affair, and as he is the originator I will quote from him, giving the *Comento* form, as the fullest.²

Having observed in his comment on "Io dico seguitando" (*Inf.* VIII, 1) that this is the first time the phrase has been employed, he continues:

"You must know that Dante had a sister who was married to one of our citizens, named Leon Poggi. She bore him several sons, the oldest of whom was named Andrea, a youth whose features were remarkably like Dante's, as well as his figure, for he walked in a somewhat stooping fashion, as Dante is said to have done. He was a simple fellow but good-hearted, and in his conversation and manners was orderly and praiseworthy. Having become an intimate friend of his, I have often heard him speak of Dante's manners and habits. Among other things which deeply impressed my memory was a story which he related to me one day while we were talking together. He said that Dante, who was a member of the party of Messer Vieri de' Cerchi and in fact was one of its leaders, learning that Messer Vieri had departed from Florence with many of his followers, himself departed and betook himself to Verona. After his departure, through the efforts of the opposing party, Messer Vieri and all the others who had departed, particularly the leaders, were condemned as rebels, in property and person. Among these was Dante. And straightway the mob rushed into the houses of the condemned and plundered them. However, fearing this, Dante's wife, Madonna Gemma, pursuant to the advice of some friends and relatives, had had some chests containing valuables — including Dante's writings — carried out of the house and put in a safe place. Now the most prominent of the partisans, not content with having robbed the houses, in a number of cases seized the estates of the condemned. And so was seized Dante's.

"Five years later when the city became more settled than it had been when Dante was condemned, he says that people began to demand, under one title or another, their rights to the property which had once belonged to the rebels; and they were heard. Therefore, the lady was

¹ *Comentum*, ed. cit., I, 274 ff.

² *Comento*, II, 129 ff.; also in Papanti, pp. 11 ff. Cf. the versions in the *Vita*, pp. 65-67, and the *Compendio*, pp. 54-56.

advised to make a request for the property of Dante at least under the rights of her dowry. While she was making preparations to carry this out, she found that she had need of certain instruments and papers which were in the chests, that she had rescued in the excitement of the turmoil and since that time had never removed from the place where she had deposited them. Wherefore, Andrea told me, she had sent for him, as Dante's nephew, and intrusting to him the keys of the chests, sent him with an attorney to look for the required papers. While the attorney was searching for them, — he says, — among various other of Dante's writings, including many sonnets, canzoni and the like, there was one especially interesting, a little copy-book in which in Dante's own hand were written the preceding seven cantos. And so he took it and carried it home; and having read and re-read it, though he understood little of it, he deemed it to be an excellent thing. To find out what it was, he determined that he ought to take it to a worthy man of our city, who at that time enjoyed great fame as a poet in rime, one Dino di Messer Lambertuccio Frescobaldi. Dino, who was marvelously pleased with them, made a copy for several of his friends and recognizing that the work was merely begun and not completed, he thought it well to send it to Dante and to pray him to finish the task which he had undertaken.

"Having found after some inquiry that Dante was at that time in Lunigiana with a noble of the Malespina family, named Marquis Moruello, who was a man of understanding and a particular friend of his, he decided to send them, not to Dante but to the Marquis, that he might bring them forth and show them to him. And so he did, praying him, so far as in him lay, to urge Dante to continue his undertaking and if possible to finish it.

"When the seven cantos came to the hands of the Marquis, he was marvelously pleased with them and showed them to Dante. Being assured that they were his work, he begged him to continue the undertaking, to which they say that Dante replied:¹

" 'I truly thought that these, with many other of my possessions and writings, had been lost at the time when my house was robbed, and therefore I had wholly taken my mind and thought from them. But since it is God's pleasure that they be not lost, and since he has sent

¹ Benvenuto da Imola gives the reply thus (I, 274): "*Redditus est mihi maximus labor cum honore perpetuo.*"

them again to me, I will endeavor with all my power to continue the task according to my first intention.'

"Therefore, returning to his former plan and taking up anew the interrupted work, he said at the beginning of the eighth canto, 'Io dico seguitando,' after the things long since interrupted.

"Now this same story, word for word without the slightest variance, was told me sometime since by a certain Ser Dino Perini, one of our citizens and a man of understanding and, according to his own statement, a most intimate friend of Dante's. But he did alter the facts in so far that he said that it was *he* and not Andrea Leoni whom the lady had sent to the chests for the papers, and that *he* had found the seven cantos and had taken them to Dino di Messer Lambertuccio.

"I know not which of the two I ought rather to believe; but whether or no either of them speaks the truth, there is one doubtful matter in their words which I can in no wise solve to my satisfaction, and that is this: in the sixth canto the author introduces Ciacco and makes him foretell that before the end of the third year from the day on which he speaks, Dante's party must fall from power — an event which actually happened, for, as we have said, the fall of the White party was coincident with the departure from Florence. Wherefore, if the author departed at the time we have mentioned before, how could he have written this? and not only this, but another canto? It is certain that Dante did not possess the spirit of prophecy, by which he might write of the future; and it seems exceedingly probable to me that he wrote what Ciacco said, after it happened. Under this interpretation the words of these men are ill in keeping with the actual facts. Supposing that someone says that the author might have remained secretly in Florence after the departure of the Whites, and then have written the sixth and seventh cantos before his departure, this is not in accordance with the author's reply to the Marquis, in which he said that he believed that these cantos had been lost with his other possessions when his house was robbed. And the theory that the author might have added the words, which he puts in Ciacco's mouth, to the sixth canto after he had recovered it, cannot be supported if there is any truth in the account given by the two men whom I have named — that Dino di Messer Lambertuccio had given a copy to many of his friends, inasmuch as some one of the copies without these words would surely appear, or surely through some ancient source,

actual or verbal, there would be some memory of it. Now how this happened or could have happened, I will leave to the judgment of the readers; each man may believe what seems to him most true or most probable."

Of course, we may at once say that these Dinos, summoned by Dante's wife, are mere figments of Boccaccio's fancy and that the whole story is simply an attempt to explain the words which begin the eighth canto. In the *Vita* and the *Compendio* no mention is made of the sources of the story nor is there any confession of doubt as to its reliability. On the whole, however, the presence of this discussion with reference to the Ciaccio episode in the later and more critical document leads me to believe that the account is really derived from an oral source. At least there seems to have grown up, perhaps through a perversion of this account, a tradition that even in Dante's time the populace was familiar with the *Divina Commedia* and often sang it.¹ There is a tale of Franco Sacchetti's, which we shall have occasion to quote later,² in which Dante meets a blacksmith singing "the book"; "*the book*" can hardly refer to anything but the *Commedia*. From Dante we have nothing to corroborate this idea; although there are several statements in his works implying that his lyrics were known, no mention is made of the knowledge of his definitive work, unless there be a suggestion in the phrase "il nome mio ancor molto non suona" (*Purg.* XIV, 21), which is highly improbable.

Quite as widely known is an anecdote with regard to the composition of the poem, found in the so-called "Letter of Hilary,"³ which is appended to a manuscript of Boccaccio. The superscription reads:

"To the renowned and magnificent lord Uguccone della Faggiola, highly pre-eminent amongst Italian magnates, brother Ilario, a humble monk of Corvo, at the mouth of the Macra, wishes salvation to him who is the true salvation of us all." After a few words on the text, "By their fruits ye shall know them," the writer begins,

"Now this man whose work, together with my exposition of it, I purpose sending you, seems, of all Italians, to have unlocked these things

¹ Cf. F. D. Guerrazzi, *I Dannati* (in *Dante e il suo secolo*, Florence, 1865, II, 348).

² Cf. pp. 48 ff.

³ Cf. Papanti, pp. 202-204; translated in Wicksteed's *Early Lives of Dante*, pp. 147-151.

(according to the Scripture phrase) out of the abundance of his internal treasury, even from his boyhood; for as I have learned from others — and very wonderful it is — before he had passed from childhood he attempted to utter unheard of things, and — which is more wonderful yet — he strove to express in vernacular speech what can scarcely be set forth in Latin itself by the most eminent authors; and I do not mean in straightforward vernacular, but in that of song. And now, to let his praises sound in his own works, wherein without doubt they shine more clearly in the eyes of the wise, I will briefly come to the purpose.

“ Well then, when the man of whom I speak purposed to go to the regions across the mountains, and was making his way through the diocese of Luna, whether moved by the religious associations of the place or by some other cause, he betook himself to the site of the Monastery named in the superscription. And when I saw him (as yet unknown to me, and to the rest, my brothers) I asked him what he sought; and when he answered never a word, and yet kept gazing at the architecture of the place, I asked him again what he sought. Then he, turning around upon me and the brothers, said, ‘ Peace.’ At this I burned ever more and more to learn from him what condition of man he was, and I drew him aside from the rest, and on holding some discourse with him knew who he was; for though I had never once seen him before that day yet his fame had long since reached me. Now when he saw that I was giving him all my attention, and perceived my eagerness for his words, he drew a little book from his bosom in friendly guise enough, and frankly presented it to me. ‘ Here ’ (he said) ‘ is a part of my work, which I take it thou hast never seen. Such is the record I leave you, that you may retain the memory of me the more firmly.’ And when he had shown me the book, I took it joyfully to my bosom, opened it, and in his presence fixed my eyes intently upon it. And when I observed that the words were vernacular, and manifested some kind of wonder, he asked me what I was boggling at. And I answered that I was astonished at the quality of the language, partly because I thought it seemed difficult, nay inconceivable, that such arduous matter could have been expressed in the vernacular, and partly because it seemed incongruous for so much learning to be combined with a plebeian garb. To which he in answer: ‘ Assuredly you have reason in your thoughts; and when first the seed, maybe implanted by Heaven, began to sprout towards such a purpose,

I chose the language rightly belonging to the same, and not only chose but (poetising in it after the accustomed fashion) I began :

" Ultima regna canam fluido contermina mundo,
Spiritus que lata patent, que premia solvunt
Pro meritis cuicumque suis."

But when I pondered on the conditions of the present age, I saw how the works of the great poets are flung aside almost as things of naught ; and thus men of high birth, for whom such works were written in a better age, have (shame on them !) abandoned the liberal arts to the common folk. Wherefore I put aside the lyre to which I had trusted, and tuned another, in harmony with the tastes of the moderns ; for in vain is tooth-food put to the mouths of them that suck.' And after saying this he added, with much affection, that if I could have leisure for such occupations, I was to go through the work with certain brief annotations, and send it on, so annotated, to you. Whereat, though I have not fully extracted all that lies concealed in his words, I have faithfully and with free heart labored ; and now in accordance with the command of that profound well-wisher of yours, I send you the work itself with the notes. And if herein aught shall seem doubtful, impute it only to my incapacity, for without doubt the text itself must be regarded as without defect in every way.

" But if Your Magnificence should at any time make enquiry about the other two parts of this work (as one who proposes to make a whole, by collecting the parts), you are to demand the second part, which follows upon this, of the renowned lord, Marquis Moroello. And the third will be able to be found with the most illustrious Frederic, King of Sicily. For, as he who is its author assured me he had purposed and designed, after considering the whole of Italy, he singled out you three, out of all the rest, to receive the offering of this three-fold work. . . ."

Even without the erroneous statements with respect to the dedication of the parts of the *Divina Commedia* which appear in the closing words of the letter, there is little reason for looking upon the document as trustworthy ; there is a touch of the melodramatic in the scene of Dante, gazing at the architecture and turning to say, " Peace ! " Boccaccio himself evidently felt some doubt of its value, for having briefly told the story as it is given here,¹ he adds : " Some will have it that he dedicated

¹ *Vita*, pp. 71-72.

the whole to Messer Cane della Scala; but as to which of these two is the truth, we have nothing else to go on save only as sundry, each after his fancy, discourse; nor is it a matter of so great weight as to call for serious consideration." This is indeed a naïve critical method, but I believe it to be sincere and therefore cannot agree with those who would have it that Boccaccio himself is the author of the letter,¹ citing certain similarities in phraseology. Whether it is the work of Boccaccio or of some petty friar, eager to lend a color of personal acquaintance to his commentary, the story that Dante started the *Commedia* in Latin is frequently repeated among the biographers;² the source is unmistakably the Hilary letter, for the verses quoted never pass the limit there given and often only the first line is found.

There are several other anecdotes related by Boccaccio, Benvenuto da Imola, and the *Anonimo Fiorentino* which seem to be derived through oral tradition from those who had known Dante; but as they are all told to illustrate some phase of his character, I have reserved them for their more fitting surroundings, including in this chapter only such of the earliest traditions as bear some direct testimony concerning the details of his life.

2. DANTE THE PILGRIM

In the pathetic passage in the *Convivio* where he tells of his exile, Dante says, "per le parti quasi tutte alle quali questa lingua si stende, peregrino, quasi mendicando, sono andato" (*Conv.* I, III, 28-30). But tradition, not content with representing him at Bologna, Verona, Siena, Venice, Naples, Padua, Ravenna, and other towns of the Italian peninsula, made of him a world-wayfarer. In fact Antonio Pucci, whose *Centiloquio*³ is a *terza rima* redaction of Giovanni Villani's *Cronica*, tells us,

"Dante par che cercasse tutto il mondo,
E l'aria, e 'l ciel; chè, quanto dir se 'n possa
Esso ne disse con parlar profondo,
Con sì bel modo, che la gente grossa
Si crede ch' e' cercasse veramente
Li sopraddetti luoghi in carne e in ossa."

¹ Cf. Zingarelli, *Dante*, pp. 243-245.

² Cf. F. Villani (Solerti, p. 88); G. Manetti (Solerti, p. 147); and G. M. Filelfo (Solerti, p. 181).

³ In Solerti, pp. 5-7, ll. 217-222 (Capitolo IV). The *Capitolo* on Dante has also been printed by A. D'Ancona, Pisa, 1868, and by V. Imbriani, Naples, 1880.

That Dante had studied in Paris was a generally accepted belief in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries; from Giovanni Villani on, we find this referred to in all of the biographers except Filippo Villani and Lionardo Bruni. Although little weight can be attached to arguments which cite passages from his works as revealing a personal acquaintance with the city, such as

"Essa è la luce eterna di Sigieri
Che leggendo nel vico degli strami
Sillogettò invidiosi veri,"

(*Par. X*, 136-138)

most of which must have been matters of common knowledge among men of learning, it is highly reasonable that Dante should have had recourse to the greatest of the theological schools of his day in the preparation for his final work.

Pucci would have us believe¹ that having refused to accept the patronage of the Pope — which one he does not state —

"Appresso se ne andò al re di Francia
Ed anch'ei il volle con seco tenere
E non volle esser sotto sua bilancia,"

and we have further evidence of this tradition in an anecdote by Vespasiano da Bisticci which repeats a time-worn tale about Dante, as happening "nella corte del re di Francia."² The only other attempt to particularize Giovanni Villani's general statement that Dante studied "in many parts of the world" (*in più parti del mondo*)³ is that of Giovanni da Serravalle, in the *Preambula* to his commentary,⁴ which, as he tells us, was completed in 1417. Here, in two passages, we learn that Dante was also a student at Oxford. In a Latin letter in hexameters which Boccaccio sent to Petrarch with a copy of the *Divina Commedia*, there is a mention of his having visited, among other places throughout the world, — such as "Aonios fontes" and "Parnassi culmen," —

"Parisios dudum, extremosque Britannos,"⁵

where no one would think of interpreting the reference to England as other than a sort of *ultima Thule*. No one after Giovanni da Serravalle

¹ *Centiloquio*, ll. 165-167.

² Cf. p. 42.

³ *Cronica*, II, 235.

⁴ *Translatio et comentum totius libri Dantis Aldighieri*, Prato, 1891, pp. 15 and 21.

⁵ *Le lettere edite e inedite*, Florence, 1877, pp. 53-54.

saw fit to repeat his statement and it was probably a simple fabrication, arising, as Dr. Moore suggests,¹ from a desire on the writer's part to flatter his English patrons, one of whom, Robert Hallam, had formerly been Chancellor of the University of Oxford.

With the story of Dante's wanderings may properly be placed a brief mention of the tradition which shows us Dante as a teacher. Speaking of Dante's stay in Ravenna under the protection of Guido da Polenta, Boccaccio says,² "And here by his teachings he trained many scholars in poetry, especially in the vernacular." This statement, amplified with years, appears in Giannozzo Manetti's *Vita Dantis*³ and still more definitely in the *Capitolo fatto per la morte di Dante*⁴ by Dino Forestani, or, as he was generally called, Saviozzo da Siena.

"Ravenna tu 'l sai ben, chè dir non cale,
Qui cominciò di legger Dante in pria
Retorica vulgare e molto esperti
Fece di sua poetica armonia."

Even more conclusive as evidence of the popular nature of this tradition is a fragmentary anecdote by an anonymous hand, found appended to a fifteenth century manuscript of the *Paradiso*.⁵

"It is a well known story that when Dante was a schoolmaster in Ravenna, reading diverse works as a teacher, a number of teachers and men of learning and scholars gathered one day near the schoolhouse and were discussing various subjects in several little groups. Among other things they fell to speaking of Dante's knowledge, and a worthy teacher said, 'You are discussing the knowledge of a boor.' Whereat he was reproved and again he said, 'I say that Dante is a boor.'⁶ And he was asked why. Then he answered, 'Because Dante has said everything that

¹ *Early Biographers*, p. 112.

² *Vita*, p. 31.

³ In Solerti, p. 137.

⁴ Edited by E. Narducci, Rome, 1859, p. 25.

⁵ Papanti, p. 114.

⁶ This same idea is found at the end of the *Chiose sopra Dante* (Testo inedito, Florence, 1846, p. 717), where on the final verses of the manuscript,

"O tu ch'achatti i' libro del villano,
Rendilo presto, perchè gran piacere
Ne tra' chostui acchi 'l chavi di mano,"

there is a comment in the margin, "Dante si chiama il villano perchè e' no' lasciò a dire ad altri nulla," and a similar expression is found in a tale of Vincenzio Borghini (in Papanti, p. 179), there placed in the mouth of Petrarch.

is worthy of memory or fame, in his poetical works and has left nothing for anyone else to say; therefore I say, he is a boor.'"

Unfortunately the rest of the manuscript is mutilated, although enough remains to make it evident that Dante is drawn into the controversy and makes a sharp retort.

Another tradition places his teaching activity at Gubbio as well as Ravenna. In the apocryphal sonnet to Busone da Gubbio, included in most of the early editions of Dante's lyrics, the poet is represented as saying — ¹

" . . . del car figliuol vidi presente
El frutto che sperasti e sì repente
S' avaccia nello stil greco e francesco,"

a passage often quoted in the past as a proof that Dante knew Greek. So, too, we find in the *Liber de Theleutologio*, a moral work of the fifteenth century, perhaps written by Sebastiano da Gubbio, these words from the author to his son, ² — "Dante, the instructor of your youth from your tender years" ([*Dantem*] *tuae a teneris annis adolescentiae preceptorem*).

This is a type of tradition which sheds light on a part of Dante's life, untouched by any of the more certain documents. Provided that we do not admit the truth of Mr. George Bernard Shaw's aphorism, that "Those that can, do; those that can't, teach," teaching seems to be the most natural profession for a man of Dante's learning to have entered upon, to eke out a meager livelihood. That financial matters were of intimate concern to him during his years of exile is evident from several passages in his works besides the one already quoted, most strikingly in the epistle dedicatory to Can Grande, where he excuses his failure to give a more detailed exposition of the prologue with the words ³ — "for I am pressed by my narrow domestic circumstances so that I must needs relinquish this and other matters profitable to the common good" (*urget enim me rei familiaris angustia, ut haec et alia utilia reipublicae derelinquere oporteat*). Surely a tradition which figures the first scholar to study the Italian tongue and an adept in the literature of the troubadours as also a teacher of the younger generation can do little violence to the truth.

¹ *Poesie liriche di Dante*, ed. G. Fornaro, Rome, 1843, Sonnet XXXIII, p. 205.

² In Solerti, p. 30, note 1.

³ Epistola X, ll. 600 ff.

3. DANTE'S PERSONAL APPEARANCE

The subject of Dante's personal appearance has received a fitting treatment by Professor Norton;¹ with two contemporary representations, there was little opportunity for a tradition to arise about his features. But there is one phase of the traditional conception which perhaps deserves a word. Says Boccaccio,² "This our poet, then, was of middle height; and when he had reached maturity he went somewhat bowed, his gait grave and gentle, and ever clad in most seemly apparel, in such garb as befitted his ripe years. His face was long, his nose aquiline, and his eyes rather large than small; his jaws big, and the underlip protruding beyond the upper," a description which Professor Norton has shown to be in perfect accord with both the Giotto portrait and the death mask, as far as the features are concerned; the other details must rest on oral tradition. Then he continues, "His complexion was dark, his hair and beard, thick, black and curling, and his expression was ever melancholy and thoughtful. Hence it chanced one day in Verona (when the fame of his works had spread abroad everywhere, and especially that part of his Comedy which he entitles *Inferno*; and when he himself was known by sight to many, both men and women), that as he passed by a gateway where sat a group of women, one of them said to the others, softly, yet so that she was heard well enough by him and by his company: 'Do you see the man who goes to Hell, and comes again, at his pleasure?' To the which one of the others answered in all good faith: 'In truth it must needs be as thou sayest. See'st thou not how his beard is crisped and his skin darkened by the heat and smoke that are there below?' And hearing these words spoken behind him and perceiving that they sprang from perfect belief of the women, he was pleased, and as though content that they should be of such opinion, he passed on, smiling a little."³

This anecdote, which is repeated almost exactly in Manetti's Latin redaction, and also, with the scene transferred to Ravenna, in Filelfo and Landino,⁴ has given rise to considerable discussion as to Dante's complexion and as to whether or no he wore a beard. Naturally we cannot

¹ Printed in C. A. Dinsmore's *Aids to the Study of Dante*, Boston, 1903, pp. 149-159.

² *Vita*, p. 43.

³ Antonius Chartularius, in his *De vita Dantis* (in Solerti, p. 78, note 4) adds: "qui raro vel numquam ridere solebat."

⁴ All in Solerti, pp. 139, 174, and 190.

expect to find any direct evidence in his work, but there are certain passages which in some wise bear on the subject. As for the color of his hair, we have his own words,

" Nonne triumphales melius pexare capillos
Et patrio, redeam si quando, abscondere canos
Fronde sub inserta solitum flavescere Sarno? "
(*Ecloga* I, 42-44)

Flavescere should mean "be golden yellow," although it is not impossible to interpret it as "be reddish" or "auburn," and the second interpretation might be made to accord with Boccaccio's statement that his hair was black, by saying that in his mature years Dante's erstwhile auburn locks grew dark, as is wont to happen with the lapse of time. Frankly, this sort of argument is, to my thinking, little more than hair-splitting, and it looks as though the statement is the result of the anecdote rather than the fact its occasion.

Another passage is the scene on the shore of the Island of Purgatory, where Virgil cleanses Dante from the stains of Hell:

" Ond' io che fui accorto di su' arte,
Porsi ver lui le guance lagrimose:
Quivi mi fece tutto discoperto
Quel color che l' inferno mi nascose; "
(*Purg.* I, 126-129)

which surely must have been in Boccaccio's mind, as he told the story of the ladies of Verona.

With regard to the wearing of a beard, the regularly quoted passage in this connection is Beatrice's command:

" alza la barba
E prenderai più doglia riguardando."
(*Purg.* XXXI, 68-69)

Of course this is not conclusive, for Dante adds,

" E quando per la barba il viso chiese,
Ben conobbi il velen dell' argomento,"
(ll. 74-75)

where we cannot be certain whether his meaning is, "I felt the poison of her words, because she called my beardless face, 'my beard' (*la barba*),

as a symbol of my manhood" or "because she chose to name that characteristic of my face, namely my beard, which stood for my manhood." No arguments can properly be drawn from the Giotto portrait nor the death mask; the former represents him as a youth, when even Boccaccio thought of him as beardless, if we are to see any meaning in his remark that after the death of Beatrice he went about "gaunt and unshaven" (*magro, barbuto*);¹ the latter must perforce have been taken when he was shaven. Perhaps the most we can say is that Dante in his later years may have worn a beard, which, after all, is saying nothing. It might well be observed, however, that of all the ideal representations of Dante which have been made since his death, not one portrays him with a beard — a fact which would seem to argue that the statement of Boccaccio is not a popular tradition but only an ingenious invention of the author's to give excuse for a story.²

Here it is fitting to add further details of Dante's private life and habits, manifestly taken from popular, oral tradition, as recorded by Boccaccio and Bruni. "In his private and public manners," says the former,³ "he was wondrous orderly and composed, and in all things was he courteous and polished beyond any other. In food and drink he was most moderate,⁴ both in taking them at the appointed hours and in never going beyond the limit of necessity, nor did he ever show any nicety in one thing rather than another. Delicate viands he complimented, and for the most part fed on plain ones, blaming beyond measure such as bestow great part of their study on getting choice things and having them prepared with extreme diligence; declaring that the likes of these do not eat to live, but rather live to eat. No man kept vigil more than he, whether in studies or in any such other concern as might assail him; in so much that many a time both his household and his wife were grieved thereat, until they grew used to his ways and took no further note of it. Seldom did he speak save when questioned, and that deliberately

¹ *Vita*, p. 18.

² In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries we find several times repeated an anecdote which tells of a vulgar, riddle-like retort from Dante to a man who called him a letter "I," because he was "di persona molto piccolo." It goes without saying that this is not representative either of popular or of literary tradition.

³ *Vita*, pp. 43-44.

⁴ Cf. Suetonius, *Life of Virgil* (in Nettlehip's *Ancient Lives of Virgil*, Oxford, 1879, p. 10), "cibi vinique minimi."

and with voice suited to the matter of discourse; not but what, when occasion rose, he was most eloquent and copious, and with excellent and ready delivery." Bruni has one or two other familiar touches:¹ "He delighted in music and melodies and himself drew excellently. He wrote a finished hand, with thin, long letters perfectly formed, as I have seen in certain epistles written with his own hand." Since these and other notices found in later imitators have been thoroughly discussed by Dr. Moore,² I will not enter upon the sundry evidences of the truth of these traditional statements which may be cited from Dante's writings.

Such is the figure of Dante that lived on in tradition. It is a many-sided one — we see him as a lover, as a man of action, as a wanderer, as a teacher. Now and then through the magic glass of these old biographers or commentators we catch a glimpse of the man as he lived and moved among his fellows. But thus far it has been hardly more than a figure. Leaving this external, this impersonal, picture of Dante, we come now to a consideration of the inner life of the poet, of his temperamental traits, of his essential personality.

¹ *Vita di Dante* (in Solerti, p. 104).

² *Early Biographers*, pp. 130-140.

CHAPTER III

THE PERSONALITY OF DANTE

I. SUNDRY TRAITS

The starting-point of all tradition is the anecdote. General ideas do not thrive in the popular mind, but give them specific form in some striking, pithy tale and they will abide with the generations. It is in this form that most of our ideas of Dante have come down to us, and particularly with Boccaccio do we find an anecdote to be the nucleus for all his general ideas of the poet. So consummate an artist as he, undoubtedly recognized the value of tales as a mere ornament to enliven his style, but to-day we find their greatest interest in the character they reflect. Let us listen to some of his stories.¹

"In his studies [Dante] was most assiduous, during such time as he assigned to them; in so much that nothing, however startling to hear, could distract him from them. And as concerning this giving himself up wholly to the thing that pleased him, there are certain worthy of faith, who relate how one of the times when he was in Siena he chanced to be at an apothecary's shop, and there a little book that had been promised him before was placed in his hand, which book was of much fame amongst men of worth, and had never yet been seen of him; and, as it befell, not having opportunity to take it to some other place, he lay with his breast upon the bench that stood before the apothecary's and set the book before him and began most eagerly to examine it; and although soon after, in that very district, right before him, by occasion of some general festival of the Sienese, a great tournament was begun and carried through by certain young gentlemen, and therewith the mightiest din of them around — as in like cases is wont to come about, with various instruments and with applauding shouts — and although many other things took place such as might draw one to look on them, as dances of fair ladies, and sundry sports of youth, yet was there never a one that

¹ *Vita*, pp. 45-46.

saw him stir thence, nor once raise his eyes from the book ; nay rather, he having placed himself there about the hour of noon, it was past vespers, and he had examined it all and as it were taken a general survey thereof, ere he raised himself up from it, declaring afterwards, to certain who asked him how he could hold himself from looking upon so fair festivities as had been done before him, that he had perceived naught at all of them ; whereat for his questioners a second wonder was not unduly added to the first."

Here is an account which, if not the report of an actual occurrence, accords in every particular with the Dante of his own works. Indeed, in the *Purgatorio* there is apparently a reference to exactly such an event as that recorded by Boccaccio :

" O immaginativa, che ne rube
 Tal volta sì di fuor ch' uom non s' accorge
 Perchè d' intorno suonin mille tube
 Chi move te, se il senso non ti porge."
 (*Purg.* XVII, 13-16)

In the *Vita Nuova* (XXXV), Dante relates this little anecdote : " On that day which fulfilled the year since my lady had been made of the citizens of eternal life, remembering me of her as I sat alone, I betook myself to draw the resemblance of an angel upon certain tablets and while I did thus, chancing to turn my head, I perceived that some were standing beside me to whom I should have given courteous welcome, and that they were observing what I did : also I learned afterwards that they had been there a while before I perceived them. Perceiving whom, I rose for salutation, and said, ' Another was with me, and therefore was I in thought.' " Once more, when Beatrice smiles to him on the Mountain of Purgatory, after ten years of longing thirst his eyes are so intent upon her that he must be aroused by a cry of " *Troppo fiso* " (*Purg.* XXXII, 9). This same theme of obsession by a single interest was employed by him as a metaphysical argument, in commenting on the lapse of time while Manfred has been revealing to him his future and the power of prayer on earth.

" Quando per diletanze ovver per doglie,
 Che alcuna virtù nostra comprenda,
 L' anima bene ad essa sì raccoglie,
 Par che a nulla potenza più intenda ;

E questo è contra quello error, che crede
 Che un' anima sopr' altra in noi s' accenda.
 E però, quando s' ode cosa o vede,
 Che tenga forte a sè l' anima volta,
 Vassene il tempo, e l' uom non se n' avvede :
 Ch' altra potenza è quella che l' ascolta,
 Ed altra quella che ha l' anima intera :
 Questa è quasi legata, e quella è sciolta."
 (Purg. IV, 1-12)

Whether or no the shop in Siena, still pointed out as the scene of Boccaccio's story,¹ has any real claim to such a fame, — for that matter, whether or no its author received it from a trustworthy source or fabricated it himself on the basis of Dante's own lines, — we feel our interest quickened at the retelling of this curious tale. We know how greedy for knowledge was Dante, how inquisitive to see the whole truth, for not the least of the joys of his Paradise is the satisfaction of this craving. Nor was it a merely idle curiosity but the object of his greatest concern. How far his power of concentration carried him in his search for truth can best be expressed by saying that he was not only the noblest poet of his age but also the profoundest scholar.

In the acquirement of what, in his day, was practically the *omne scibile*, Dante was aided by another faculty to which Boccaccio has called attention.²

"Moreover, this poet was of marvelous capacity and firmness of memory, and of piercing intellect, in so much that when he was in Paris, and in a disputation *de quolibet* held there in the schools of theology, fourteen theses had been maintained by divers men of worth on divers matters, he straightway gathered all together, with the arguments for and against urged by the opponents, and in due sequence, as they had been produced, recited them without break, following the same order, subtly solving and refuting the counter arguments, the which thing was reputed all but a miracle by them that stood by."

Nowadays we are grown accustomed to similar feats by chess-players, but we need not marvel if then it was counted prodigious. It is not strange either that Dante was reputed to have a memory above the average; even in Boccaccio's day there must have been many a man —

¹ Cf. Papanti, p. 28, note 5.

² *Vita*, p. 46.

whose father or other ancestor rejoiced in a permanent resting place in Inferno, thanks to Dante's excellent memory — who heartily wished that he had forgotten some things. Strangely enough, one of the very few traditions which have persisted in the popular mind, and which have not found their way into print until almost our own day, concerns Dante's memory.

"There is a popular tradition," says Fraticelli,¹ "that when Dante was in Florence, on warm evenings he used to frequent the Piazza di Santa Maria del Fiore, then called Santa Reparata, to enjoy the cool air, sitting on a bit of wall, at a place where a few years ago a tablet was set up with the inscription *Sasso di Dante*. Now one evening while he was sitting there, a stranger approached and asked him: 'Messere, I am pledged to give an answer and I know not how to get out of my trouble. You who are so learned perhaps can suggest a way to me. What is the best mouthful?' Dante without hesitating answered, 'The egg.' A year later, he was sitting on the same wall, when the man appeared again and had no sooner seen him than he asked, 'With what?' And Dante promptly, 'With salt.' And it was a wonderful thing — according to those who believe such tales — that although caught thus off his guard, he managed to recall the first question and, connecting it with the second, to answer so perfectly to the point." This is one of the tales that rivals the phoenix; in the seventeenth century it turns up in Sicily, as an event in the life of a popular poet, Pietro Fullone, and I have heard of its being told within the last decade, almost without change, to a class in psychology, as an actual occurrence illustrating the association of ideas.

Turning now to what Boccaccio is pleased to include among Dante's *qualità e difetti*,² we learn that "he took full much to himself; nor, as those of his day report, did he deem himself of lesser worth than in truth he was. The which appeared once, amongst other times, most notably, whilst he was with his faction at the highest point of the government of the Commonwealth. For when they who were undermost had, by mediation of Pope Boniface VIII, summoned a brother or relative of Philip, then king of France, whose name was Charles, to make straight the affairs of our city, all the chief men of that faction with which Dante

¹ *Vita di D. A.*, p. 263; also in Papanti, p. 205, and in Crane, *Italian Popular Tales*, Boston, 1885, p. 381.

² *Vita*, p. 60.

held, assembled in council to make provision against this; and there, amongst other things they ordained that an embassy should be sent to the Pope, who was then at Rome, to induce him to oppose the coming of the said Charles, or to make him come in concert with the party which was then in power. And when they came to consider who should be the chief of this embassy, they all said that it must be Dante; to which request Dante, after pondering in himself for a space, replied, 'If I go, who stays? If I stay, who goes?' As though he alone amongst all the others had any worth or gave any worth to the rest."

The anecdote is probably apocryphal and is found in a collection of *Facezie e motti* of the fifteenth century¹ as the remark of a certain Duke Giovanni, instead of Dante. But disregarding the question of its actual occurrence, let us consider what there is in Dante's own work which would warrant such a charge of presumption against him.

As he walks on the dike beside the fire-swept sand, conversing with Brunetto Latini, his old teacher says:

"Se tu segui tua stella,
Non puoi fallire al glorioso porto,
Se ben m' accorsi nella vita bella:
E s' io non fossi sì per tempo morto,
Veggendo il cielo a te così benigno,
Dato t' avrei all' opera conforto.
Ma quell' ingrato popolo maligno,
Che discese di Fiesole ab antico
E tiene ancor del monte e del macigno,
Ti si farà, per tuo ben far, nimico:
Ed è ragion; chè tra li lazzi sorbi
Si disconvien fruttare al dolce fico."

(*Inf.* XV, 55-66)

Herein at once we have a commendation of past service and a promise of future glory; his confidence in the future is as great as his sense of satisfaction with the past. There are numerous passages in the *Divina Commedia* which point to this confidence, particularly with respect to his

¹ *Facezie e motti dei secoli XV e XVI*, ed. Papanti, Bologna, 1874 (*Scelta di curiosità letterarie*, CXXXVIII), No. 13, p. 9:

"Il signore Ruberto da san Severino usa dire: E' si vuole vincere. Item: chi vuole ire, vada. Et pero il duca Giovanni, quando era in consulta di far la impresa del reame, dubitando delle cose di casa sua, disse: Se io sto, chi va? et se io vo, chi sta qui, Signore?"

fame as a poet. In *Limbo* he is taken into the goodly company of the poets — Virgil, Homer, Horace, Ovid, and Lucan (*Inf.* IV, 100-102); speaking of Guinizelli's having yielded to Cavalcanti the glory of the tongue, he says:

" — e forse è nato
Chi l'uno e l'altro cacerà di nido,"
(*Purg.* XI, 98-99)

which seems with all probability to refer to himself. Passing over the implication of the line

" Chè il nome mio ancor molto non suona,"
(*Purg.* XIV, 21)

we have from the lips of Cacciaguida a definite statement of the divine call and the earthly power of his work.

" Tutta tua vision fa manifesta,
E lascia pur grattar dov' è la rogna;
Chè se la voce tua sarà molesta
Nel primo gusto, vital nutrimento
Lascerà poi quando sarà digesta.
Questo tuo grido farà come vento
Che le più alte cime più percote;
E ciò non fa d' onor poco argomento."
(*Purg.* XVII, 128-135)

We, to-day, in view of the verdict of the centuries, may well accept as natural such a splendid self-assurance, but it is not surprising if Boccaccio and others of his day sometimes felt that Dante was arrogating unto himself more than was becoming to a mortal. But Boccaccio manifestly looks on his demeanor as justifiable if not actually praiseworthy; it is the dignified self-satisfaction of the man who is confident of his verdict from God and from man, the true magnanimity, or better, in Aristotle's language, *μεγαλοψυχία*.

2. "ALMA SDEGNOSA"

For all of the traits of Dante of which we have caught a glimpse thus far, we are indebted to Boccaccio; outside of frequent repetitions by his followers, he is the only interpreter. One phase of Dante's nature, however, remained, as Professor Del Lungo has said,¹ "traditionally

¹ *Dal secolo e dal poema di Dante*, Bologna, 1898, p. 353.

characteristic of Dante the man and Dante the poet, — disdain, or rather scorn." And there has survived a considerable body of tradition which emphasizes this trait, scattered through writers of every sort, from the serious chronicler to the dispenser of airy badinage. This was the one item of personal comment which the first of his biographers, Giovanni Villani,¹ saw fit to include in his outline. "This Dante," he says, "because of his knowledge was somewhat haughty and reserved and disdainful, and after the fashion of a philosopher, careless of graces and not easy in his converse with laymen."² Boccaccio, to illustrate this scornful temperament, relates a story from his experience — I quote from the *Compendio*,³ in which it takes the form of an anecdote.

"Dante was of a very lofty and disdainful disposition, in so much that when a certain friend of his strove to bring about his return to Florence, and could find no other way thereto, unless he should abide for a time in prison and then be presented as an offering, by way of mercy, at the church of S. Giovanni, Dante, crushing his ardent desire to return, answered, 'God forbid that any man, bred and reared in the lap of philosophy, should become the sorry candle of his commune.'" In the *Vita*,⁴ moralizing he continues: "Oh worthy and magnanimous disdain, how didst thou play the man!"

With this story one naturally associates the *Epistola Amico Fiorentino*,⁵ and with more reason, inasmuch as the letter is found in that text of Boccaccio's which also contains the "Letter of Hilary." I will cite a portion to show how closely it tallies with Boccaccio. "Is this then the glorious recall wherewith Dante Alighieri is summoned back to his country after an exile patiently endured for almost fifteen years? Did his innocence, manifest to whomsoever it may be, deserve this — this, the sweat and unceasing toil of study? Far be the rash humility of a heart of earth from a man familiar with philosophy, that like a prisoner he may suffer himself to be offered up after the manner of a certain Ciolo and other criminals. Far be it from a man who preaches justice after having

¹ *Cronica*, II, 235.

² Cf. Antonio Pucci, *Centiloquio*, lines 256–258 (in Solerti, p. 7):

"Dante fu bene assai presuntuoso
E co' laici poco conversava
E di tutti era schifo e disdegnoso."

³ *Compendio*, p. 52; also in Papanti, p. 10.

⁴ *Vita*, p. 59.

⁵ *Epistola IX*, p. 413.

patiently endured injury to pay his money to those inflicting it, as though they were his benefactors." Bartoli¹ and Scartazzini² have argued against the authenticity of the letter and with justice. The very fact that in the passage just quoted and also a few lines later, the name "Dantes" appears is almost convincing evidence that it does not come from the hand of the poet, who, when for the first and only time in all his writings he has allowed his own name to be uttered—in Beatrice's words,

"Dante, perchè Virgilio se ne vada,
Non pianger anco, non pianger ancora,"
(*Purg.* XXX, 55-56)

thinks it necessary to add,

"... mi volsi al suon del nome mio,
Che di necessità qui si registra."³
(ll. 62-63)

Whether it was Boccaccio or some contemporary who fabricated the epistle, it stands as an example of the traditional conception of Dante's scornful independence.

In another letter,⁴ formerly attributed to Dante but now generally admitted to be spurious, we find the same trait thrown into relief. Dante is represented as writing to Guido da Polenta some account of his embassy to the Venetian republic⁵ and has remarked how his careful speech of felicitation on the election of a new Doge, couched in seemly Latin, was answered by a request to provide an interpreter or change in mode of speech. "Thus between astonishment and scorn," he continues, "I know not which the more, I began to say a few words in that tongue which I have used from what time I was in swaddling clothes, which was but little more familiar and natural to them than the Latin had been. . . .

¹ *Vita di D. A.*, ed. cit., p. 287, note 2.

² In *Ein Kapitel aus dem Dante-Roman* (in *Schweizerische Rundschau*).

³ Cf. *Convivio*, I, 2, 15 ff. "Non si concede per li rettorici alcuno di sè medesimo senza necessaria cagione parlare."

⁴ In Papanti, pp. 3-5.

⁵ Giovanni Villani, II, 235, mentions an embassy to Venice, and Filippo Villani (in Solerti, pp. 86-87) says that on this embassy he contracted the illness which resulted in his death. Manifestly it is not the one, then, which is referred to in this letter, dated March 30, 1314. But the author was rather careless of dates—a fact demonstrated by the knowledge that Guido was not "Lord of Ravenna" in 1314 and that no Doge of Venice was elected between 1312 and 1328. Cf. Latham, *Dante's Eleven Letters*, p. 277.

But that they do not understand the Italian speech is not at all a matter of wonder, since, descended from Greek and Dalmatian progenitors, they have brought to this delectable land nothing but the worst and most shameful customs, together with the mire of all unbridled lasciviousness." The bitterness of the attack on the Venetians can hardly have been suggested by Dante's comment on their idiom in the *De vulgari eloquentia* (I, 14), where he treats them with leniency, and we must rather suppose the author to have been prompted by some civic animosity. For the rest, the letter adds little to our understanding of Dante.

Before proceeding to a discussion of the various anecdotes illustrative of Dante's scornful temper, we may well pause for a moment to observe what evidence of this trait we may find in his works. The *Inferno* presents Dante in a rôle which must assuredly have exercised a considerable influence in perpetuating this conception of him; only rarely does he show compassion for the damned, as in the case of Francesca or of Brunetto Latini; usually we find him cutting the tormented souls with a bitter thrust. So to the question of Filippo Argenti, sunk in the mud of the Styx — "Chi se' tu che vieni anzi ora?" — he answers,

"S'io vegno, non rimango;
Ma tu chi se', che sei sì fatto brutto?"

And after Filippo's pathetic reply,

"Vedi che son un che piango,"

comes this terrific burst of scorn,

"Con piangere e con lutto,
Spirito maledetto, ti rimani:
Ch'io ti conosco, ancor sia lordo tutto."
(*Inf.* VIII, 33 ff.)

Again, in the next circle, he finds Farinata degli Uberti among the other heretics. From his fiery tomb the patriot recalls to Dante that his Guelph ancestors have twice been cast out of Florence by the Ghibellines; and Dante,

"S'ei fur cacciati, ei tornar d'ogni parte,"
Rispos'io lui, "l'una e l'altra fiata,
Ma i vostri non appreser ben quell'arte."
(*Inf.* X, 49-51)

There is cruel irony in his retort to Alessio Intermini, who from the filth of the flatterers has demanded,

"Perchè se' tu sì ingordo
Di riguardar più me, che gli altri brutti?"
Ed io a lui: "Perchè, se ben ricordo,
Già t'ho veduto coi capelli asciutti."
(*Inf.* XVIII, 120-123)

And finally his scorn prompts him even to do violence to Bocca degli Abati, as he lies buried in the ice of Antenora (*Inf.* XXX, 97 ff.).

It is well to remark that such a treatment of the damned was to Dante's thinking veritably commendable;

"E cortesia fu in lui esser villano,"

he says after his refusal to abide by his promise to Frate Alberigo (*Inf.* XXXIII, 150), and earlier in the *Inferno*, after his retort to Filippo Argenti, which we have just mentioned, Virgil kisses him and says:

"Alma sdegnosa,
Benedetta colei che in te s'incinse."
(*Inf.* VIII, 44-45)

Of his high respect for the quality of disdain when rightly directed we have some hint in the figures he has drawn. The angel, who advances across the Styx to impose subjection on the keepers of the gate of the City of Dis, is "pien di disdegno" (*Inf.* IX, 88), and in the *Purgatorio*, Sordello, who becomes under Dante's impression almost a stamp of the Italian patriot, is thus greeted:

"O anima Lombarda,
Come ti stavi altera e disdegnosa!"
(*Purg.* VI, 61-62)

which we have seen to be precisely the description given of Dante by Boccaccio.

To Dante, then, disdain, righteous scorn, was not a sin, and had he written the last *trattato* of the *Convivio*, he would no doubt have distinguished it carefully from pride. We need not here enter into a discussion of the latter quality; let it suffice to quote one of the many passages which are brought forward to demonstrate how keenly alive

Dante was to this particular shortcoming, — his words as he enters the circle of Envy, having left that of Pride, —

"Tropo è più la paura, ond' è sospesa
L' anima mia, del tormento di sotto,
Che già lo incarco di laggiù mi pesa."
(*Purg.* XIII, 136-138)

Inasmuch as most of the anecdotes which typify Dante as the *alma sdegnosa* are also examples of his sharpness of tongue, it is not out of place to record at this point the statements of his early biographers with respect to this characteristic. Boccaccio¹ and his amplifier Manetti² merely observe that he was "eloquent and copious with excellent and ready delivery" (*eloquentissimo fu e facondo, e con ottima e pronta prola-zione*), but Bruni assures³ us that he was "very keen in retort" (*nelle sue risposte molto sottile*), and Filelfo, not to be outdone, glibly records: "He was full of *bons mots*, quips, and apothegms"⁴ (*Erat autem salium cavillorumque plenissimus et apophthegmatum*) — which would seem, after all, to be more applicable as an encomium of some local *uomo di corte* than of the judge of popes and kings. The few examples we have cited to illustrate his scornful temper in the *Inferno* will be sufficient to show how true to life this tradition was.⁵ Let us now look at the anecdotes of Dante which bear out this general belief in his sharp-tongued scorn.

Among the thousands of quaint and curious bits of information garnered in the *Res Memorandae* of Petrarch, there are two pictures of Dante at the court of Can Grande della Scala.⁶

"Dante Alighieri, who was not long since a fellow citizen of mine, was famous as a writer in the vernacular, but through arrogance he was too free in his manners and speech to find favor with the delicate eyes and ears of the princes of our time. And so as an exile, at the court of Can Grande, at that time the common place of refuge for the distressed, he was at first held in honor, but little by little he began to lose favor and to be less pleasing to his host. At table with him there used to sit

¹ *Vita*, p. 44.

³ In Solerti, p. 104.

² In Solerti, p. 140.

⁴ In Solerti, p. 175.

⁵ There is another phase of Dante's humor, — I mean the playful, the whimsical, — of which tradition took little account and which is often disregarded by modern students. One day I hope to return to this question.

⁶ *Res Memorandae*, Basel, 1581, Book II, p. 427; also in Papanti, pp. 31-32. There is a translation in Toynbee's *Dante*, pp. 176-177.

buffoons and low fellows of every sort, as is customary, and one of them, whose words and behavior were especially wanton, was held in great esteem. Can Grande, suspecting that Dante was piqued at this, called the fellow out before the company one day, and when he had showered him with praise, turning to Dante,

" 'I wonder,' he said, 'what is the reason that this witless fellow has skill to please us all and to be loved by us all — a thing which you, who are supposed to be wise, cannot accomplish!'

" Dante retorted,

" 'You would not wonder if you knew that equality of manners and similarity of mind is the cause of friendship.' "

Domenico Bandini (fl. ca. 1400) in a chapter on Dante¹ included in the book *De viris claris* of his still unpublished *Fons memorabilium universi* quotes the story of Petrarch and assigns the episode as the reason for Dante's leaving Verona for Ravenna. The frequent repetition of this and other anecdotes in which Dante scores Can Grande seems to have been the source of this belief in the lack of harmony between them. And yet if we are to interpret Dante's own tribute to his patron in the most obvious way, the words,

" A lui t' aspetta ed ai suoi benefici ;
Per lui fia trasmutata molta gente,
Cambiano condizion ricchi e mendici,"
(*Par.* XVII, 88-90)

would point to a very high appreciation of his sense of justice. In all probability, Cacciaguida's prophecy,

" Tu proverai sì come sa di sale
Lo pane altrui, e com' è duro calle
Lo scendere e il salir per l' altrui scale,"
(*Par.* XVII, 58-60)

was a sufficient warrant to the story's being told on Can Grande, even in spite of any inaccuracy. For the tale-monger, finding that Dante was a man of sharp tongue, that he knew the bitterness of a courtier's life and that he had been at the court of Can Grande, it is a perfectly logical conclusion that Dante vented his scorn on Can Grande. Just how was, of course, a matter for each *novelliere* to determine for himself.

¹ In Solerti, p. 93.

As we have already observed, this "bird of a feather" story was very widely repeated of Dante. In a slightly different form it appears in Poggio's *Facetiae*,¹ in a manuscript of Michele Savonarola,² grandfather of Girolamo, in the *Facezie*³ of Lodovico Carbone, in a brief note on Dante in the *Epitoma in vitas scriptorum illustrium latinae linguae* of Siccio Polenton,⁴ and finally, as happening at the court of the French king, by Vespasiano da Bisticci.⁵ I will quote Dr. Toynbee's translation⁶ of Savonarola's version as a specimen of the variants.

"I will tell you the answer made by Dante to a buffoon at the court of the Lord della Scala of Verona, who, having received from his master a fine coat as a reward for some piece of buffoonery showed it to Dante, and said, 'You with all your letters and sonnets and books, never received a present like this.' To which Dante answered, 'What you say is true; and this has fallen to you and not to me, because you have found your likes, and I have not yet found mine. There, you understand that.'"

In this form the story becomes familiar: it is the old anecdote of Marco Lombardo, told in the *Novelle Antiche*,⁷ which ends with almost the same words, "You have found more of your likes than I of mine." As an experience of Marco Lombardo it is also recorded in the *Anonimo Fiorentino*⁸ comment on the line

"Lombardo fui, e fui chiamato Marco."

(*Purg.* XVI, 46)

Manifestly, then, we have here a well-known anecdote which in time, seeming to accord with the traditional idea of Dante, was associated with his name. As Mr. J. A. Macy remarks in his whimsical paper entitled "The Career of the Joke,"⁹ "To express new oil from jests once dry with wit and to-day not too dry with age, it is necessary only to fit

¹ *Facetiae*, London, 1798, pp. 66-67; also in Papanti, pp. 90 and 92.

² In Papanti, p. 94.

³ *Facezie*, ed. Abd-el-Kader Salza, Livorno, 1900, LXXI, pp. 51 ff.; also in Papanti, p. 111.

⁴ In Solerti, p. 155; added is: "Salsa quidem responsio et mordax."

⁵ In Papanti, pp. 116-117.

⁶ *Dante*, pp. 177-178.

⁷ Ed. Biagi, Florence, 1880, cod. Laurenz., XVII, p. 221.

⁸ Ed. P. Fanfani, Bologna, 1868, II, 262; also in *Libro di Novelle Antiche*, ed. F. Zambrini, Bologna, 1868, No. LXXVII, p. 200; and Papanti, p. 95.

⁹ In *Atlantic Monthly*, vol. xcvi (1905), pp. 498-510.

it to modern instances, to apply it locally or to connect it with the name of a contemporary celebrity"; and we shall find that to the retailer of incidents in Dante's career, the mere fact that a tale was first written down a few centuries before is only an added incentive to spur him into a masterly exercise of his ingenuity in making it fit snugly in its new surrounding.

Papanti¹ and Köhler² have listed numerous repetitions of this tale in Latin, French, and German, some of them with Dante still as the hero, others once more transferred to a new figure. As far as I can discover, it is the only anecdote which found its way into England. With the rubric, "Nota exemplum cuiusdam poete de Italia qui Dantes vocabatur," Gower gives this version in the *Confessio Amantis*:³

"I not if it be ye or nay,
How Dante the poete answerde
To a flatrour, the tale I herde,
Upon a strife betwene hem two
He said him, there ben many mo
Of thy servautes than of min.
For the poete of his covine
Hath none, that woll him cloth and fede,
But a flatrour may reule and lede
A king with all his londe about.
So stant the wise man in doubt
Of hem that to folly drawe,
For such is now the comun lawe."⁴

But the vicissitudes of these tales are of no particular moment; Petrarch has another to tell.⁵

"On another occasion when he was a guest at a banquet of noble folk, and the master of the feast, who was already merry with wine and well stuffed with food, was sweating copiously, all the while talking a stream of frivolous, false and idle stuff, for some time he listened in angry silence. At last the whole company grew surprised at his silence, and the talkative

¹ Pp. 96-97.

² *Ueber Papanti*, etc., pp. 630-633.

³ Ed. Dr. R. Pauli, London, 1851, III, 163.

⁴ This is quoted in P. Toynbee, *The Earliest References to Dante in English Literature* (*Miscellanea di Studi Critici in onore di Arturo Graf*), Bergamo, 1903, p. 15.

⁵ *Res Memorandae*, pp. 427-428.

fellow, who, by this time, was in a spirit of exaltation at having won distinction as a wit by the consensus of opinion, laid his dripping hands on Dante and said,

"What! Did you think that a man who tells the truth is not working?"

"And Dante —

"I was wondering why you were in such a sweat."

Although this keen retort is repeated in the *Facezie e Motti*¹ and in a garbled form in *La Zucca*² of Antonfrancesco Doni as well as the *Detti e fatti di diversi signori*³ of Lodovico Domenichi, there is apparently no version of it before Petrarch's. The reply is rather too *recherché* to suggest that it was one of the jests bandied about by the idlers in barbers' and apothecaries' shops.

A good old tale, fairly green with age, is one told by Benvenuto da Imola in his comment⁴ on

"Credette Cimabue nella pittura
Tener lo campo, ed ora ha Giotto il grido."
(*Purg.* XI, 94-95)

"Once when Giotto, while still a young man, was painting a chapel in Padua, in a place where there had formerly been a theatre or an arena, Dante came in. Giotto took him home full courteously and there Dante saw several ugly-looking little children who looked very much like their father. Dante asked him, 'Worthy master, why is it, I wonder, that although your other faces are so beautiful that we say you have no equal in the art of painting, your own are so ugly?' Giotto answered with a smile, 'I make my pictures (*pingo*) by daylight but I make my children (*fingo*) by night.' This reply amused Dante greatly not because it was original, for it is found in the *Liber Saturnalium* of Macrobius, but because it seemed in keeping with the man's nature."

Giotto enjoyed no small fame as a wag and he is often the subject of tales.⁵ Although the laugh is on Dante in this instance, his question is full of his customary air of superiority. In Macrobius⁶ the tale is told of an otherwise unknown painter, one L. Mallius. But it is not necessary

¹ Ed. cit., No. 140, p. 91; also in Papanti, p. 89.

² Id., p. 147.

³ In Papanti, p. 142.

⁴ Ed. cit., III, 313.

⁵ Cf. Boccaccio, *Decameron*, VI, 5, and Sacchetti, *Novelle*, 63 and 75.

⁶ *Saturnalia*, II, 2, 10, ed. Eyssenhardt, Leipzig, 1893, p. 139.

to suppose that this version came directly from him, for we have evidence that this was a well-known pun from its appearance among some Latin stories¹ of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries under the heading "De quodam picture." In fact, it is one of the primitive jests which were probably current in Rome as early as the art of painting.

In the *Commento d' Anonimo Fiorentino* there is told a quick retort of Dante's which has every savor of actuality about it.²

"Belacqua was a citizen of Florence, an artisan and manufacturer of necks of lutes and guitars, and he was the laziest man that ever was. The story is told of him that he would come to his shop in the morning and sit down and never get up, except when he wanted to go to dinner or to bed. Now Dante Alighieri was an intimate acquaintance of his and he used to chide him severely for his indolence. And so, one day when he was thus chiding him, Belacqua answered in the words of Aristotle, 'Sedendo et quiescendo anima efficitur sapiens.' To which Dante replied, 'Assuredly, if a man grows wise by sitting still, no man was ever wiser than you.' " Benvenuto in his comment³ on the same passage (*Purg.* IV, 97 ff.) tells us that Dante frequented his shop because of his fondness for music, "for Belacqua sometimes played." Outside of a translation by Serravalle in his commentary,⁴ it is not found elsewhere.

From the pen of Franco Sacchetti, that merry bourgeois of Florence whose *Trecento Novelle* belong in style and artistic polish to a period between the *Novelle Antiche* and the *Decameron*, though they were not written till late in the fourteenth century, we have several stories of Dante which accord with the conception of him which we have been illustrating. The first⁵ presents Dante in a part in which we have not thus far found him.

"There was at one time in the city of Genoa, a learned citizen, right well versed in sundry branches of learning; and in person he was small and passing spare. Moreover he was deeply in love with a fair lady of Genoa, who, either because of his spare frame or from her own high

¹ Cf. Thomas Wright, *A Selection of Latin Stories from MSS. of the 13th and 14th Centuries*, London, 1842, No. CXXVIII, p. 122. (Quoted by Köhler.)

² Ed. cit., II, 74 (on *Purg.* IV, 97 ff.); also in Papanti, p. 45, and Zambrini, *Libro di Novelle Antiche*, ed. cit., No. LXIX, p. 82.

³ Ed. cit., III, 133.

⁴ Ed. cit., p. 474.

⁵ Ed. O. Gigli, Florence, 1888, No. 8, p. 23; also in Papanti, pp. 51-53.

sense of honor or for some other reason, far from loving him, never even turned her eyes on him but rather, to avoid him, would turn them in the opposite direction. Wherefore, despairing of success in this love and hearing of the great renown of Dante Alighieri, and how he dwelt in Ravenna, he minded him to go thither to see him and to become acquainted with him, desiring to secure from him aid or advice, how he might win the lady's love or at least how he might move her to be less hostile to his suit. And so he set forth and came to Ravenna, where after a season he succeeded in obtaining an invitation to a dinner at which Dante was a guest. As they sat at table not far from each other, the Genoese seeing his opportunity said,

"Messer Dante, I have heard much of your ability and of the renown which is current about you. May I ask you for your advice?"

"Dante replied, 'Provided that I can give it.'

"Then the Genoese said:—

"I have loved, and still love, a lady with all the loyalty that love demands. Never have I been rewarded by her,—not to mention with her love,—but even with a single glance.'

"Dante, hearing these words and observing his spare appearance, said: 'Messere, willingly would I do anything which would give you pleasure, and touching the matter with regard to which you ask me at this present, I see only one course; that is this: you know that ladies with child always crave strange things and therefore it is necessary that the lady whom you love so dearly be brought to bed with child. If she were with child,—even as it often happens that they have a longing for unusual things,—so it might come to pass that she have a longing for you. In this wise you would be able to fulfill your desire; otherwise it would be impossible.'

"The Genoese, realizing that he was stung, said: 'Messer Dante, you have advised me two things which are more improbable than the original; for it is improbable that the lady be brought to bed with child, inasmuch as this has never yet happened, and if it should happen, it would be far more improbable, considering the divers manners of things which they desire, that she should chance to desire me. But, God knows, no other reply was becoming to my question than that which you have made me.'

"Thus did the Genoese come to understand himself, for Dante had better understood what sort of man he was, than he himself. In truth,

he was of such a sort that well-nigh any lady would have shunned him. And he came to have such acquaintance with Dante that for many days he tarried in his house, dwelling with him in the greatest intimacy. This Genoese was a man of learning but he was not destined to be a philosopher — of the sort we have to-day; inasmuch as philosophy knows all things naturally. And if a man knows not himself first of all, how shall he ever know that which is outside of him? This man had he looked upon himself, be it in the mirror of the mind or in one of matter, would have divined what was his frame and have realized that a fair lady, even though she be chaste, desires that he who loves her shall have the form of a man and not of a bat. But it seems that to most men may be applied the proverb: 'There is no deceit worse than self-deceit.'"

The theme of this story is made the subject of an anecdote, recorded in the *Facchie e Motti*,¹ about one Zanobi di Raffaello Acciaiuolo, who was enamored of a certain Maria di Girolamo Moregli and was put to shame by the same counsel; and the general vagueness of the background is a further reason for making it almost certain that this is another of the perennial stories transplanted to new surroundings.

There is another story of Dante as the purveyor of advice to the lover which I will quote here, although its spirit is quite alien to that of the other tales.

"Aldrovandino Donati, a young man of about Dante's age, once asked him how he might subject to his will the lady whom he loved and for whose sake he had in vain devoted himself to verses of love. Dante answered, 'Do you know, Aldrovandin, my friend, why the nightingale, whose song is sweeter than that of any other bird, spends part of the year pouring out his soft tones day and night, and the rest, is silent?' When Aldrovandino said he did not know, Dante continued, 'So long as he loves, he sings; and as soon as he can satisfy the love for which he lifted such melody to heaven, he ceases every sweet sound. Wherefore, if you are become as virtuous as you say, by virtue of the lady who is so dear to you, to bring her to your will without human virtue — even as the nightingale which is only a bird — would be to nullify all the worth whence so much praise comes to you.'"

¹ Ed. cit., No. 53, p. 46. (I believe no one has cited this parallel.)

First published in 1882 by Pedrazzoli,¹ the tale was said by him to be drawn from a Trecento manuscript containing three anecdotes from Dante. However, I find it also related in the *Life of Dante* by Filelfo² toward the end of the fifteenth century, together with some remarks on morals to show that Dante was so continent that he never burned with love for any woman. The fact that it is so strikingly different from the other tales of Dante which appear in the first centuries — and this is also true of one of the other tales found in the same manuscript — inclines me to believe that the date has been erroneously assigned and that it is only a translation of Filelfo. And Filelfo, we know, would not have scrupled to invent a new deluge, if it had been necessary to prove his point.

Two of Sacchetti's tales are variations of one and the same motive — a motive, too, which we shall see has amused many nations.³

"That most excellent poet in the vulgar tongue, whose fame will never die, Dante Alighieri of Florence, lived in Florence not far from the Adimari family, one of whom, a young man, got into trouble through some misdoing or other, and was like to be sentenced to punishment by one of the magistrates. As the magistrate was a friend of Dante's, the young man begged the latter to intercede in his favor, which Dante readily consented to do. After dinner Dante went out from his house and started on his way to fulfill his promise. As he passed by the Porta San Piero, a blacksmith was hammering iron on his anvil, and at the same time bawling out some of Dante's verses, leaving out lines here and there, and putting in lines of his own, which seemed to Dante a most monstrous outrage. Without saying a word he went up to the blacksmith's forge, where were kept all the tools he used to ply his trade, and seizing the hammer flung it into the street; then he took the tongs and flung them after the hammer and the scales after the tongs; and did the same with a number of the other tools. The blacksmith, turning around to him with a coarse gesture, said: 'What the devil are you doing? are you mad?' Dante replied: 'What are you doing?' 'I am about my business,' said the smith, 'and you are spoiling my tools by

¹ *Tre motti inediti di Dante (per le nozze Montecchi-Boselli)*, Mantua, 1882.

² In Solerti, p. 175.

³ *Novelle*, ed. cit., CXIV, pp. 274 ff.; also in Papanti, pp. 53 ff. The translation is Dr. Toynebee's, in his *Dante*, pp. 180-183.

throwing them into the street.' Dante retorted: 'If you do not want me to spoil your things, do not you spoil mine.' The smith replied, 'And what of yours am I spoiling?' Dante said, 'You sing out of my book and you do not give the words as I wrote them. That is my business and you are spoiling it for me.' The blacksmith, bursting with rage, but not knowing what to answer, picked up his things and went back to work. And the next time he wanted to sing, he sang of Tristram and Lancelot and let Dante's book alone.

"Dante meanwhile pursued his way to the magistrate; and when he was come to his house and bethought himself that this Adimari was a haughty young man, and behaved with scant courtesy when he went about in the city, especially when he was on horseback (for he used to ride with his legs so wide apart that if the street happened to be narrow he took up the whole of it, forcing every passer-by to brush against the points of his boots—a manner of behavior which greatly displeased Dante, who was very observant), Dante said to the magistrate: 'You have before your court such a young man for such an offence; I recommend him to your favor, though his behavior is such that he deserves to be the more severely punished, for, to my mind, usurping the property of the commonwealth is a very serious crime.' Dante did not speak to deaf ears. The magistrate asked what property of the commonwealth the young man had usurped. Dante answered: 'When he rides through the city he sits on his horse with his legs so wide apart that whoever meets him is obliged to turn back and is prevented from going on his way.' The magistrate said: 'Do you regard this as a joke? It is a more serious offence than the other.' Dante replied: 'Well, you see, I am his neighbor, and recommend him to you.' And he returned to his house, where the young man asked him how the matter stood. Dante said: 'He gave me a favorable answer.' A few days afterward the young man was summoned before the court to answer the charge against him. After the first charge had been read, the judge had the second read also, as to his riding with his legs wide-spread. The young man, perceiving that his penalty would be doubled, said to himself: 'I have made a fine bargain. Instead of being let off through the intervention of Dante, I shall now be sentenced on two counts.' So returning home he went to Dante and said: 'Upon my word, you have served me well! Before you went to the magistrate he had a mind to sentence me on one count; since you

went he is like to sentence me on two,' and in great fury he turned to Dante and said: 'If I am sentenced I shall be able to pay, and sooner or later I will pay out the person who got me sentenced.' Dante replied: 'I did my best for you, and could not have done more if you had been my own son. It is not my fault if the magistrate does not do as you wish.' The young man, shaking his head, returned home, and a few days afterwards was fined a thousand lire for the first offence, and another thousand for riding with his legs wide-spread—a thing he never ceased to resent, both he and all the rest of the Adimari. And this was the principal reason why, not long after, Dante was expelled from Florence as a member of the White party, and eventually died in exile at Ravenna, to the lasting shame of his native city."

Early in the third century of our era, when scholarship was beginning to sink to the age of commentaries and compendiums, Diogenes Laërtius gathered together a formidable array of facts in his *Lives of Famous Philosophers*, and there, in his life of Arcesilaus, he briefly states the theme of this story.¹ The original protagonist was Philoxenus of Alexandria and he, "having overheard some brickmakers singing his songs badly, trampled on their bricks, saying, 'As you ruin my property, so I yours'" (*ὡς ὑμεῖς τὰ ἐμὰ διαφθείρετε, οὕτω καὶ τὰ ὑμέτερα*). Once more, in the first part of the fourteenth century, it turns up, this time in the *Libro del cavallero et del escudero*² of Don Juan Manuel, where the angry versifier is a *cavallero de Perpinnan* and the unwitting victim is a cobbler. Papanti also calls attention³ to the fact that since Dante's time it has been told of Ariosto—the best natured of men—by Blanchard in his *Plutarque de la jeunesse*.

If the first part of the anecdote is only an adaptation of a time-worn "chestnut," the latter part records an event for which there is some degree of probability. Balbo, in his *Vita di Dante*,⁴ was the first, I believe, to suggest that the young man of the Adimari family may have been Filippo Argenti, "il fiorentino spirito bizzarro," who, we have seen before, was treated with such bitter scorn by Dante. The early

¹ Ed. Cobet, Paris, 1850 (*Scriptorum Graecorum Bibliotheca*), Bk. IV, chap. 6, p. 102.

² Ed. S. Gräfenberg, *Romanische Forschungen*, VII (1891-1893), pp. 443-444; also in J. D. M. Ford, *Old Spanish Readings*, Boston, 1906, pp. 52-53.

³ P. 62.

⁴ Ed. cit., p. 188.

commentators¹ on the passage in the *Inferno* (VIII, 32), almost without exception, state that Filippo was one of the Adimari, and Boccaccio² has an explanation of his nickname "Argenti." "This Filippo Argenti," he says, "was very rich, so that sometimes he had his horse shod with silver (*d'ariento*) and from this was taken his nickname. He was a man of huge frame, dark-skinned and sinewy and of marvelous strength and exceedingly wrathful."³ This picture certainly accords closely with Sacchetti's and, although the latter's closing words about the cause of Dante's exile are far-fetched, this ill feeling between the two would offer a not unreasonable explanation for the almost personal venom which Dante displays toward him in their brief colloquy on the Styx.⁴

The other story of Sacchetti's makes a donkey-driver the object of Dante's ire.⁵

"On another occasion, as Dante was walking through the streets of Florence on no particular errand, and, according to the custom of the day, was wearing a gorget and arm-piece, he met a donkey-driver whose donkeys were loaded with refuse. As he walked behind the donkeys, the driver sang some of Dante's verses, and after every two or three lines he would beat one of the donkeys and cry out: 'Arri!' ('Get-up'). Dante going up to him gave him a great thump on the back with his arm-piece and said: 'That *arri* was not put in by me.' The driver not knowing who Dante was, nor why he had struck him, only beat his donkeys the more, and again cried out, 'Arri!' But when he had got a little way off, he turned around and put out his tongue at Dante and 'made the fig' with his hand saying, 'Take that!'⁶ Dante seeing this, said to him: 'I would not give one word of mine for a hundred of yours.'

¹ Cf. Scartazzini's edition of the *Divina Commedia*, pp. 71-72.

² *Comento*, II, 150.

³ Cf. *Decameron*, IX, 8 (Florence, 1904, II, 323 ff.), where Filippo is described as "uomo grande e nerboruto e forte, sdegnoso, iracundo e bizzarro più che altro."

⁴ For further discussion cf. A. Bartolini, *Studi Danteschi*, Siena, 1889, I, 97-108, and G. Federzoni, *Studi e Diporti Danteschi*, Bologna, 1902, pp. 337 ff.

⁵ *Novelle*, ed. cit., CXV, pp. 276-277; also in Papanti, pp. 57-58. Toynbee's translation.

⁶ Papanti points out (p. 64) that this gesture and retort are found in the *Novelle Antiche* (ed. cit., p. 229), told of a certain Messer Beriulo and a lackey. One thinks, too, of Vanni Fucci, defiant under his torment, like Beëlzebub:

"Le mani alzò con ambedue le fiche,
Gridando: 'Togli, Iddio, chè a te le squadro.'"
(*Inf.* XXV, 2-3)

Oh! gentle words, worthy of a philosopher! Most people would have run after the donkey-driver with threats and abuse; or would have thrown stones at him. But the wise poet confounded the donkey-driver, and at the same time won the commendation of every one who had witnessed what took place."

Quite as ancient as the tales of the poet and the unhappy singer is one which appears in a new garb in the *Novelle* of Giovanni Sercambi of Lucca.¹

"In the days when King Robert of Naples was still alive, Dante, the poet of Florence, having been forbidden to live in his native city or anywhere within the States of the Church, took refuge sometimes with the Della Scala family at Verona, and sometimes with the Lord of Mantua, but oftenest with the Duke of Lucca, namely Messer Castruccio Castracani. And inasmuch as the fame of the said Dante's wisdom had been noised abroad, King Robert was desirous of having him at his court, in order that he might judge of his wisdom and virtue; wherefore he sent letters to the Duke, and likewise to Dante, begging him to consent to come. And Dante having decided to go to King Robert's court, set out from Lucca and made his way to Naples, where he arrived, dressed, as poets mostly are, in somewhat shabby garments. When his arrival was announced to King Robert, he was sent for by the King; and it was just the hour of dinner as Dante entered the room where the King was. After hands had been washed and places taken at table, the King sitting at his own table and the barons at theirs, at the last Dante was placed in the lowest seat of all. Dante, being a wise man, saw at once how little sense the King showed. Nevertheless, being hungry, he ate, and after he had eaten, he, without waiting, took his departure, and set out towards Ancona on his way back to Tuscany. When King Robert had dined, and rested somewhat, he inquired what had become of Dante, and was informed that he had left and was on his way towards Ancona. The King, knowing that he had not paid Dante the honor which was his due, supposed that he was indignant on that account and said to himself: 'I have done wrong: after sending for him, I ought to have done him honor, and then I should have learned from him what I wanted.' He therefore without delay sent some of his own servants after him, who caught up with him before he reached Ancona. Having received the King's letter, Dante turned round and went back to Naples, and dressing

¹ Ed. A. D'Ancona, Bologna, 1871, IX, pp. 62-66; also in Papanti, pp. 65-67.

himself in a very handsome garment, presented himself before King Robert. At dinner the King placed him at the head of the first table, which was alongside of his own; and Dante, finding himself at the head of the table, resolved to make the King understand what he had done. Accordingly, when the meat and wine were served, Dante took the meat and smeared it over the breast of his dress, and the wine he smeared over his clothes in like manner. King Robert and the barons who were present, seeing this, said, 'This man must be a good-for-nothing; what does he mean by smearing the wine and gravy over his clothes?' Dante heard how they were abusing him but held his peace. Then the King, who had observed all that passed, turned to Dante and said: 'What is this that I have seen you doing? How can you, who are reputed to be so wise, indulge in such nasty habits?' Dante, who had hoped for some remark of this kind, replied: 'Your Majesty, I know that this great honor which you now show me, is paid not to me, but to my clothes; consequently I thought that my clothes ought to partake of the good things you provided. You must see that what I say is the case, for I am just as wise now, I suppose, as when I was set at the bottom of the table, because of my shabby clothes; and now that I have come back, neither more nor less wise than before, because I am well dressed, you place me at the head of the table.' King Robert, recognizing that Dante had rebuked him justly, and had spoken the truth, ordered fresh clothes to be brought for him, and Dante after changing his dress ate his dinner, delighted at having made the King see his own folly. When dinner was over, the King took Dante aside, and, making proof of his wisdom, found him to be even wiser than he had been told; wherefore King Robert paid Dante great honor and kept him at his court, in order that he might have further experience of his wisdom and virtue."

Although this anecdote is not found in classic literature, it is widely spread throughout Europe and Asia, appearing (at times in a slightly varied form) in the *De contemptu mundi*¹ of Innocent III, written between 1190 and 1198, in the so-called *Liber de Donis*² of Étienne de Bourbon (thirteenth century), and in the *Jests* of Nasr-eddin Hodja,³ a

¹ Ed. Achterfeldt, Bonn, 1855, Bk. ii, § 39, pp. 113-114; also in Papanti, p. 72.

² *Anecdotes historiques, légendes et apologues*, ed. A. Lecoy de la Marche, Paris, 1877, No. 507, p. 438.

³ *Les Plaisanteries, traduites du turc par Decourdemanche*, Paris, 1876, No. LV, p. 48.

Turkish collection of about the fourteenth century. Since Dante's time it has been often repeated of one philosopher or another and it also appears in Sicilian folklore in the *Nuvella di Giufà*.¹

Before discussing Dante's relation to Robert of Naples, we may well quote another anecdote of Sercambi's purporting to have taken place at the same court.²

"You have heard in the preceding tale how King Robert of Naples, out of curiosity to see Dante and to gain experience of his wisdom, called him to his court. And having learned that he was wise he wished to test whether he was strong in suffering insult. He planned to provoke him by means of his buffoons; summoning six of them before him, he bade them bait Dante till he grew angry. However, he would not that they say or do anything offensive but only that they try him with jesting words. The buffoons, who are naturally quick and cunning, undertook to enrage Dante with some jests; and at the same time, they thought to vilify his learning in a decent manner. Having laid their plans, each one of them, arrayed in fair garments, entered into the presence of the King and Dante. The King, who was aware of their intention, taking Dante by the hand, walked up and down the room with him, questioning him anon, until the buffoons, approaching the King, said: 'Your Majesty, we marvel that you are so familiar with this prelate who seems to be a man of small worth.' The King said: 'What! Do you not know that he is the wisest man in Italy?' The buffoons said: 'Tell us how that is. Is he Solomon?' 'He is Dante,' answered the King. 'Well, well!' said one of the buffoons. 'Who would have thought it! He looks like one of those low fellows from Florence and I am not sure that he is wise enough to know that the Arno flows backward so that little fish may be caught at Monte Murlo.'

"Before he had stopped, the second began, 'Your Majesty, if Dante is as wise as he holds, I wish that he would tell me why a black hen lays a white egg.'

"'How well you have spoken, comrade,' said the third, 'for if Dante is the wise man he pretends to be, when he has answered your question, he will tell me why the ass lays square dung from a round opening.'

¹ Cf. Laura Gonzenbach, *Sicilianische Märchen*, Leipzig, 1870, No. 37, I, 258-259; also given in T. F. Crane, *Italian Popular Tales*, Boston, 1885, p. 296.

² *Novelle*, ed. cit., No. X, p. 67; also in Papanti, pp. 67-71.

"The King stops and is tempted to laugh, but to conceal the cause from Dante he refrained. Dante, who had recognized the buffoons at first sight, saw that the King was at the bottom of it and thought how he might make reply to all the questions by a figure of speech, casting all the shame on the King.

"The fourth buffoon, hearing the subtle and profound questions, turns toward Dante and says: 'Dante, your fame flies in every direction, like feathers tossed from a tower — one going up, another down, this way and that; tell me, what do the planets do?'

"The fifth buffoon says: 'Assuredly Dante must know, having searched thoroughly within and without, how a man may serve God and the world.'

"The last one says: 'Oh King, I have heard that Dante is wise; for my part I do not believe it, inasmuch as the wise man always gains, and gaining, lives in honor, while *he* lives in shameful fashion. Therefore, realizing that each one of you has greater understanding than he, I count it unbecoming, your Majesty, that he should go thus on terms of equality with you.'

"Dante who had swallowed it all without the least sign of anger, said nothing, as though it had not been addressed to him.

"'Dante,' says King Robert, 'are you not going to answer what these men have asked and said to you?'

"'I thought that they were talking to you, Sire,' says Dante, 'and therefore I left the answer to you. But since you say that they were speaking to me, I will undertake the task of answering, although it little becomes me to speak of such matters in your presence, for it were rather fitting for such as you to make answer. But since it is your pleasure, I will answer them all — according to the content of their question. Beginning with the first, then, how the Florentines have made the Arno flow backward to catch little fish, I say, that they turned back the sea, which is water of great power, and far from catching small fish, they caught one large one and many medium-sized and smaller ones — and that was when they captured the fair castle of Prato, where the king who was lord of it was captured.'

"When King Robert heard this, he saw the truth of it and said, 'Pay me back in my own coin; I am listening.'

"Turning to the second buffoon Dante said: 'Every realm, however large it may be, as King Robert knows, pretends to be the egg of the eagle; that is, every lord should be subject to the Empire.'

"King Robert, who was an ardent Guelph, realized that he was aiming at him.

"Then to the third: 'The round,' he said, 'cannot rationally be unequally distant from the centre, but is everywhere equally distant, and anything which is transformed from the round may be said to be adulterated. Therefore, I say that the court in which there are adulterers, that is, men who are deformed from the round, that is from the realm, may be called square dung, and consequently the man who supports them may be considered an ass and not a lord.' The King, understanding these words, counted Dante to be wise, as having perceived the trick.

"Then turning to the fourth buffoon, Dante said, 'You have asked me of other things; I answer you this: that you are not capable of understanding what you ask, but a man who believes he is capable and has the desire will never care to have acquaintance with hidden things, if he consorts with buffoons like you.' King Robert, who was always desirous of knowing, saw that Dante's words were meant for him.

"The fifth buffoon was standing on tip-toe in his eagerness to hear the solution of his question. Dante said: 'I will show you how you may win Paradise and Hell; hold your head in Rome and your other end in Naples'—as much as to say, 'in Rome all things are holy; in Naples all the ladies and all the men are given over to desire and lust.' In this way, the King understood that in Naples there was not a lady nor a man who was free from the vice of lust.

"Desirous of giving his answer to all, Dante turned to the last buffoon, saying, 'If Dante found as many lunatics as you find, he would be better garbed than you, for naturally sense ought to be held in higher esteem than lunatics and buffoons.'

"At this the King said: 'Are we who keep buffoons then, lunatics?'

"'If you love virtue,' answered Dante, 'you are mad to follow this present custom of consuming your substance on such fellows.'

"The King and the buffoons saw that Dante had put them to shame, and the King turning to Dante, said: 'Now I perceive that your ability is greater than was reported,' and he told him the plan he had employed with his buffoons saying, 'Now I would have you remain in my court.' And he honored him with gifts.

"In this wise did Dante out-wit the buffoons and bring the King to a better understanding."

To speak truth, Sercambi has not greatly enhanced our esteem of Dante by this tale; the answers are badly strained — sometimes so far as to break with sense. But it is reminiscent of the discussion in Paris of which Boccaccio told,¹ with its fourteen propositions and refutations. As for Dante's having been at the court of Robert, there is absolutely no reason for thinking that there is any truth in the statement of Sercambi. Filelfo does say² that one of Dante's embassies took him "ad regem Parthenopæum"; but this could not have been Robert, who did not receive the crown until 1309, and for that matter, Filelfo is negligible as far as the truth is concerned. Furthermore, it is hardly within the realm of the probable that Dante would have accepted an invitation from the king whose representative as governor of Florence renewed the decree of exile against him in 1315,³ although he refers to him without bitterness in the *Paradiso* (VIII, 76 ff.). On the whole, it looks as though Sercambi was prompted by a desire to portray the great Ghibelline outwitting a famous Guelph and at the same time to heap a little general abuse on Naples and the Neapolitans — a manifestation of local pride and spirit which we have observed before and which has always been prevalent among the Italian *novellieri*.

In his lively, though vulgar, collection of strange events and cute sayings, the *Facetiae*, Poggio Bracciolini has left us three anecdotes of Dante. One⁴ — that of the "birds of a feather" — we have already discussed; the other two supplement the conception of Dante which informs the tales we have already cited.

"Once at a dinner with the elder and the younger Cane della Scala, the servants of both the lords, with a view to provoking Dante, covertly placed all the bones at his feet. When the table was removed the whole company turned toward Dante in wonder that the bones should be seen only before him. With his usual readiness in retort, he said: 'It is not at all strange if the dogs (*Canes*) ate their bones; but I am not a dog.'"⁵

Here again is a venerable old story, rejuvenated to apply to Dante. A wag at the court of Ptolemy Euergetes — one Tryphon by name — plays the same trick on Hyrcanus, according to the story told by Flavius Josephus⁶ in his *Jewish Antiquities*, and Hyrcanus retorts: "Oh

¹ Cf. p. 32. ² In Solerti, p. 184. ³ Cf. Carpenter, *Documents*, No. XI, pp. 51-53.

⁴ Cf. pp. 40-42.

⁵ *Facetiae*, ed. cit., p. 67; also in Papanti, p. 92.

⁶ *Opera omnia*, ed. Bekker, Leipzig, 1856, III, 92 (*Antiquities*, XII, 4, 9).

King, dogs are wont to eat the bones with the meat even as these fellows, but men eat the meat" (εἰκότως ὃ δέσποτα τοὺς μὲν γὰρ κύνας τὰ ὀστᾶ σὺν τοῖς κρέαςι κατεσθίειν ὥσπερ οὗτοι . . . οἱ δ' ἄνθρωποι τὸ κρέας ἐσθίουσι). In the Middle Ages the tale is told of two buffoons in the *Disciplina Clericalis*¹ of Petrus Alfonsus and in two early verse redactions in French called "Le chastoïement d'un père à son fils" under the caption *De deus jugléors*. In the popular tradition it is found in the fabliau of *Les deux parasites*. Papanti quotes an analogous tale from the popular Persian stock:

"A King was eating dates along with his Wuzeer, and flung all the stones near the latter. When they had done, the King said to the Wuzeer, 'Thou art a great glutton, to have such a number of date stones before thee.' The Wuzeer answered, 'No, the Asylum of the World has a voracious appetite, having left neither dates nor stones.'"

Poggio's version was several times imitated by later Italian tale-tellers and one, Lodovico Carbone,² naïvely suggests how the story came to be told, for his account ends, "And this he said because his host's name was *Cane* (dog)." The rest of the story is easily built with this foundation.

The other story of Poggio's illustrates a further characteristic of Dante.³

"When our poet Dante was an exile in Siena, he was standing one day in the Church of the Frati Minori with his elbows on an altar, buried in thought of some secret matter. A troublesome fellow came up to ask a question. Dante said: 'Tell me, what is the greatest of all the brutes?' 'Why, the elephant!' said he. 'Elephant,' said Dante, 'leave me alone and do not annoy me, for my mind is busy with matters of more import than your chatter.'"

Aside from the references we have already made to Dante's habit of burying himself in his own thoughts, we have the testimony of Boccaccio,⁴ who says: "He delighted to be alone and far removed from all folk, that his contemplations might not be broken in upon; and if some thought that pleased him well should come to him when in company, howsoever he should be questioned about aught, he would answer his questioner

¹ These tales are all recorded in Papanti, pp. 168-172.

² Ed. cit., No. LXX, p. 50. This and others may be found in Papanti, pp. 112, 139, and 166.

³ *Facetiae*, ed. cit., p. 129; also in Papanti, pp. 92-93. For imitations, see Papanti, pp. 129, 148, and 177.

⁴ *Vita*, p. 45.

never a word until he had either accepted or rejected this his imagination. And many times this chanced to him as he sat at table, or was journeying with companions and elsewhere too, when questioned." In a later anecdote¹ we shall see a charge of heresy brought against him, as a result of this abstraction.

There are several short *motti* attributed to Dante which should be placed among the anecdotes which bring into prominence his sharpness of speech.

From an anonymous pen² we have this boorish reply.

"A peasant, whom Dante asked what time it was, answered: 'It is time to water the cattle' (*bestie*). Dante retorted: 'What are you doing, then?'"

Filelfo tells us:³

"When Gieri del Bello once asked Dante who was the wisest man in the city, he received this answer: 'It is he who is most hated by the fools.'"

And again, to demonstrate his readiness in repartee, he spins this yarn:⁴

"When someone objected that Florence was being badly governed, inasmuch as it was suffering from a famine, while Siena was enjoying a season of plenty, he said, 'Perhaps corn is cheaper at Cortona too,' meaning that Florence was so great and so wealthy that things could not be so cheap there as in rural districts where there is a dearth of money."

It is hardly conceivable that so extensive a body of stories, all of which are expressions of the same characteristic, should have grown up in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries apart from a popular tradition. We have an additional proof of the existence of such a tradition in the fact that such of the stories as are repeated show slight variations in treatment or expression — a condition not likely to appear unless they had been told from hearsay. There are, too, some signs of that popular exaggeration which verges on the legend. The Dante who lived in the memory of the men and women of the Trecento and Quattrocento was not the trembling lover of Beatrice, but the proud figure who sounded the depths of the *Inferno*, the *alma sdegnosa*.

¹ Cf. p. 68.

² *Facerie e Motti*, ed. cit., No. 148, p. 94; also in Papanti, p. 89.

³ In Solerti, p. 175; also in Pedrazzoli, *Tre Motti di Dante*, ed. cit.

⁴ In Solerti, p. 175.

CHAPTER IV

DANTE'S SIN

Of a very different type is the tradition which appears not long after Dante's death, bringing against him the charge of licentiousness. In the *Vita* of Boccaccio we have this general statement: ¹ "Amid all the virtue, amid all the knowledge that hath been shown above to have belonged to this wondrous poet, lechery found most ample place not only in the years of his youth, but also of his maturity; the which vice, though it be natural, and common, and scarce to be avoided, yet in truth is so far from being commendable that it cannot be suitably excused." The *Compendio* is more explicit; ² having told of Dante's love for Beatrice, the story continues: "Nor was this the only love with which our poet burned, but he was rather greatly subject to this passion. We find that in his more mature years he often sighed for other women and, especially after his exile during his stay in Lucca, for a maiden whom he names Pargoletta; and furthermore toward the end of his life in the mountains of the Casentino for a mountain girl, who—if I am not falsely informed—although fair in countenance, had a goitre. And for one or the other of these he wrote full many praiseworthy works in rhyme."

Serravalle, who derives most of the contents of his *Preambula* from Boccaccio, repeats ³ the statement about the maid of Lucca named Pargoletta (*philocaptus in Luca de una alia puella, nomine Pargoletta*), and Manetti, deriving his matter, as usual, from the *Vita* not the *Compendio*, makes the general charge ⁴ (*Lascivis aliquantulum amoribus obnoxium plus indulgisse visus est quam viro philosopho convenire videretur*), going on to remark that Socrates had been accused of the same offense. In his comment on Beatrice's reproof of Dante, the author of the *Ottimo Comento* lists certain of Dante's loves; ⁵ "Beatrice says that neither the maiden whom in his verses he called Pargoletta nor that Lisetta nor that

¹ *Vita*, pp. 61–62.

² *Compendio*, p. 17.

³ Ed. cit., p. 15.

⁴ In Solerti, pp. 140–141.

⁵ *Ottimo Comento*, ed. Accademici della Crusca, Pisa, 1827–1829, II, 549.

other mountain maid nor any other ought to have weighed downward the feathers of his wings."

Even more atrocious are the villanies charged to his account by some of the early commentators. Pietro Alighieri has two passages of this sort: one¹ as an explanation of the *corda* which Dante ungirds to lower to Geryon, "verum quia fraudem solum commiserat circa deceptiones mulierum, ideo fingit in chordula, hoc est quia zona luxuria figuratur"; the other² in his comment on Pyramus and Thisbe (*Purg.* XXVII, 37 ff.), "nota auctorem in hoc vitio [defloratione virginum] fuisse multum implicatum." All of the early commentators agree with Pietro in calling the *corda* the symbol of Dante's deceit of women.³ There is also a somewhat related statement in the *Liber de Theleutologio*, where, under the subject of "Luxuria et ejus effectibus," the author says,⁴ "Haec illa est quae Dantem Alagherii . . . adulterinis amplexibus venenavit."

In beginning I remarked that this tradition was of a very different sort from that which recalled his disdainful spirit. This is apparent in several respects. In the first place, that it was not a universally accepted belief is evidenced by Bruni's definite contradiction:⁵ "He consorted in his youth with amorous swains and was himself too engaged in the passion, not by way of wantonness but in gentleness of heart." Filelfo's defense⁶ we must discard on principle. Moreover, all of the specific charges made are based on Dante's own works. So, the reference to Gentucca by Bonagiunta da Lucca,

" 'Femmina è nata, e non porta ancor benda,'
Cominciò ei, 'che ti farà piacere
La mia città, come ch' uom la repretenda, ' "

immediately following the words

" — e non so che ' Gentucca '
Sentiva io là,"

(*Purg.* XXIV, 37-38)

¹ *Commentarium*, ed. V. Nannucci, Florence, 1846, p. 180.

² *Op. cit.*, p. 489.

³ Cf. Scartazzini, *Commedia*, p. 155.

⁴ In Solerti, p. 30, n. 1. N. Zingarelli, in *La Data del Teleutologio (Studi di Letteratura Italiana*, I, 180 ff.), suggests that this phrase had best be taken metaphorically as referring to *luxuria*.

⁵ In Solerti, p. 104.

⁶ In Solerti, p. 163.

combined with the reference to a "Pargoletta" by Beatrice (*Purg.* XXXI, 59), was certainly the source of Boccaccio's statement in the *Compendio*. The "mountain maid" is, of course, drawn from the famous canzone "Amor, dacchè convien pur ch'io mi doglia" (XI), and "Lisetta," named in the *Ottimo*, is apparently from the sonnet "Per quella via che la bellezza corre" (XLIV).

Probably Beatrice's reproof and Dante's confession of error are the principal source for all of these statements. It is outside the province of this study to enter into a discussion of the true meaning of the passage,¹ which has so long vexed commentators and interpreters. From those who understand his faithlessness to have been only his devotion to poetry or philosophy to those who would have it refer to one sin or other of the flesh, there is a far cry. Whatever may have been Dante's meaning, Boccaccio and certain other writers of the years immediately after Dante's death, interpreted it in its sensual aspect. I have been inclined to believe that Boccaccio was led to accept this interpretation the more readily because he found in the "Life" of Virgil, prefixed to the Commentary of Donatus, a statement² that Virgil was "libidinis in pueros pronior." There can be little doubt that Boccaccio was familiar with this "Life"; his own story of the dream of Dante's mother, of which we shall speak later,³ is apparently an imitation of that told of Virgil's mother in this same work. Finding, then, that lust was charged to Virgil, he naturally would be less moved to scruple to attribute a similar sin to his confessed pupil.

In the tradition outside of men of letters this conception of Dante never gained any hold in Italy. There is not a single reference to it in the anecdotic literature of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and after that time the few tales which do reflect on Dante's reputation — scabrous colloquies with prostitutes for the most part — are rather signs of the general literary degeneracy of the times than evidence of any popular belief that they accorded with Dante.

¹ Kraus, *Dante*, pp. 147-151, has a thorough discussion.

² Cf. Nettleship, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

³ Cf. pp. 76-79.

CHAPTER V

DANTE AND THE CLERGY

"Questi fur cherchi, che non han coperchio
Piloso al capo, e Papi e Cardinali —"

Virgil tells Dante, as they pass a tonsured group, pushing weights by force of chest in the Circle of the Avaricious, and tradition, prompted by his daring here and by his frequent invectives against the clergy who were still alive, — for the average man is always a bit gratified at the discomfiture of those in authority, — invented some tales of his own personal experience. So we hear from Benvenuto da Imola:¹

"At a dinner in Verona an inquisitive fellow asked him, 'How is it learned sir, that a man who has once been shipwrecked goes to sea again, that a woman who has borne a child is willing to conceive again, that so many thousands of poor men do not swallow up the few rich?' Dante, fearing lest he be charged with error by the less intelligent guests, wisely avoided offering a solution and answered: 'Add this: why do princes and kings of the earth reverently kiss the foot of the son of a washer-woman or a barber, when he has been made Pope?'"

The story is nowhere else told and, in point of fact, has its answer in at least two passages of the *Divina Commedia*, which reveal how deep was his respect for the papal authority. To Nicholas III he cries:

"E se non fosse, che ancor lo mi vieta
La riverenza delle somme chiavi,
Che tu tenesti nella vita lieta,
I' userei parole ancor più gravi,"
(*Inf.* XIX, 100-103)

and in answer to Hadrian V's question as to why he kneeled, he says:

"Per vostra dignitate
Mia coscienza dritto mi rimorse."
(*Purg.* XIX, 131-132)

But the story is typical of Dante's attitude toward the popes as men.

¹ Ed. cit., III, 514 (on *Purg.* XIX, 127); also in Papanti, p. 38.

The unmasking of a Franciscan friar through Dante's penetration is the theme of a tale found in a Trecento manuscript in the Biblioteca Riccardiana.¹

"While Dante was staying at the court of a certain lord on terms of the greatest intimacy, he noticed that a Franciscan friar, an excellent Christian and a man of parts, withal, who enjoyed a great reputation for spiritual living, frequented the court and often went to visit the gentleman's wife, frequently remaining alone with her in her apartments, with the door locked. Dante, deeming that this intimacy was not wholly honorable, out of love for his host could not refrain from telling him frankly of the affair. The husband told him that the friar was looked upon almost as a saint. Thereupon Dante returned to him on the following day, and on that very day and at that very hour the friar arrived and after a short stay with the gentleman went to visit the lady. When the friar had departed, Dante seeing when he had gone, approached his host and gave him these four verses, which induced the said gentleman to order, to his honor, that henceforth the said friar should not go to visit his wife without him. And he had the verses written in many places in his palace. The verses are as follows:

" Chi nella pelle d' un monton fasciasse
 Un lupo, e fra le pecore 'l mettesse,
 Dimmi, cre' tu, perchè monton paresse,
 Ched ei però le pecore salvasse? "

The quatrain about which this story has been built has had a complicated history. First published together with the anecdote by Lami² in 1756, it was reprinted alone as Dante's composition in Trucchi's³ *Poesie italiane* in 1846. In the latter edition there is also printed a mutilated sonnet of which this is the first quatrain. Viani, publishing an edition of the *Rime*⁴ of Bindo Bonichi, a didactic Siennese poet of the early fourteenth century, in 1867, on the authority of a Laurentian manuscript which gives the sonnet complete, restored it to Bindo, the more readily,

¹ Papanti, pp. 40-41; also in Zambrini, *Libro di Novelle Antiche*, ed. cit., No. XIII, p. 34.

² *Catalogus codicum manuscriptorum*, p. 22.

³ *Poesie italiane inedite*, Prato, 1846, I, 296.

⁴ *Rime*, ed. P. Viani, Bologna, 1867 (*Curiosità letteraria*, LXXXII), Sonnet XX, p. 184, and note on pp. 150-151.

as he says, "because Bonichi's muse was accustomed to find delight in heaping scorn on the clergy of his time, as may be seen in his sonnets."

Bindo's version runs:

" Chi nella pelle d' un monton fasciasse
 Un lupo, e tra le pecore 'l mettesse,
 Dimmi, cre' tu, perchè monton paresse,
 Ched' e' perciò le pecore servasse?
 O delle carni lor e' non mangiasse,
 Come più tosto giugner le potesse,
 Purchè 'l pastore non se n' accorgesse,
 Qualunque e l' una non la divorasse?
 Io prego ognun, che del guardar s' ammanni
 Da questi cota' frati ripentuti,
 Che ad ingannare altrui portan gli panni.
 Giuroti in fede mia, se Dio m' aiuti,
 Che la lor santità è pur d' inganni,
 E di ciò molti esempi n' ho veduti."

Two French scholars¹ had already pointed out that the quatrain is a rough translation of a speech of Faux-semblant in the *Roman de la Rose*:²

" Qui de la toison dan Belin,
 En leu de mantel sebelin
 Sire Ysangrin afubleroit,
 Li leu qui mouton sembleroit,
 S'il o les brebis demorast,
 Cuidiés vous qu'il nes devorast? "

and the rest of the sonnet of Bindo Bonichi is a free version of the following lines in the *Roman*. When Castets published an unedited manuscript in 1881, containing a series of sonnets called *Il Fiore*,³ by one Durante, which was frankly a version of the *Roman de la Rose*, and one of the sonnets of Falsenbiant began,

" Chi della pelle del monton fasciasse
 I[l] lupo e tralle pecore il mettesse,
 Credete voi perche monton paresse
 Che de le pecore e' non divorasse? "

¹ Th. Puymaigre, *Poètes et romanciers de la Lorraine*, Paris, 1848, p. 10; and E. J. B. Rathery, *L'influence de l'Italie sur les lettres françaises*, Paris, 1853, p. 28.

² Ed. Marteau, Orleans, 1878, III, 76, ll. 11511-11516.

³ *Il Fiore par Durante*, ed. F. Castets, Montpellier, 1881, Sonnet XCVII. Cf. note, pp. 153-155.

the whole question of the authorship of the *Fiore* was made to hang on the other quatrain. Not to enter at length into the various arguments,¹ it seems unlikely that the *Fiore* is Dante's work and still more improbable that the isolated quatrain is from his hand. Possibly Bonichi's sonnet was mutilated by some cleric who desired to destroy the allusion to the fraternity and in its truncated form gave rise to the tale we have quoted. The belief that Dante was the author may have been facilitated by similar figures used by Dante himself in referring to the clergy in such passages as,

"il maladetto fiore
Ch' ha disviate le pecore e gli agni,
Perocchè fatto ha lupo del pastore,"
(*Par.* IX, 130-132)

or

"In vesta di pastor lupi rapaci
Si veggion di quassù per tutti i paschi."
(*Par.* XXVII, 55-56)

Troya² tells us that the lord at whose court the incident took place was Guido Salvatico di Casentino, and the lady, the Countess Caterina, his wife, a statement for which Trucchi quotes³ a manuscript as authority, but the whole account is probably the invention of some well-meaning commentator who desired to explain the genesis of this isolated verse and was conscious that Dante had little love for the representatives of the Church, outside of their spiritual capacity.

His frequent invectives against both popes and prelates need not be discussed here; they form a thread which runs through all of his works. Carducci remarks⁴ that this Voltairian characteristic was one of the chief causes of the charge of heresy which was brought against him after his death. According to Boccaccio,⁵ the *De Monarchia* was the cause of the accusation and he even says that Dante's remains were in jeopardy. The anecdote is worth repeating.

¹ Cf. G. Mazzoni, *Se possa Il Fiore essere di Dante Alighieri* (*Raccolta di studij critici dedicata ad A. D'Ancona*), Florence, 1901, pp. 657 ff., and F. D'Ovidio, *Se possa Il Fiore essere di Dante Alighieri* (*Nuovi studii danteschi*), Milan, 1907, pp. 567 ff.

² *Del Veltro Allegorico*, ed. cit., p. 73.

³ *Poesie italiane*, I, 296.

⁴ *Della varia fortuna di Dante* (*Studi letterari*), Livorno, 1880, p. 277.

⁵ *Vita*, p. 73.

"This book was condemned several years after the author's death by Messer Beltrando, Cardinal of Poggetto, and papal legate in the parts of Lombardy; Pope John XXII being in the Chair. And the reason was because Lewis, Duke of Bavaria, chosen King of the Romans by the electors of Germany, came to Rome for his coronation, against the pleasure of the said Pope John, and being in Rome, he made a minor friar, called brother Piero della Corvara, Pope, in violation of the ordinances of the Church, and he made many cardinals and bishops; and there he caused himself to be crowned by this Pope. And a question as to his authority rising up in many cases, he and his followers, having come upon this book, began to make use of many of the arguments it contained, in support of his authority and of themselves; whereupon the book, hitherto scarcely known, became very famous. But afterwards, when the said Lewis was gone back to Germany, and his followers, especially the clergy, had come to their fall and were dispersed, the said Cardinal, with none to gainsay him, seized the aforesaid book, and condemned it publicly to the flames, as containing heresies. And in like manner he was bent on dealing with the bones of the author, to the eternal infamy and confusion of his memory, had it not been opposed by a valiant and noble cavalier of Florence, by name Pino della Tosa, who was then at Bologna, where this thing was being discussed."

Outside of a statement of Bartolo de Saxoferrato, quoted in the *Life of Dante* of Domenico Bandini¹ to the effect that "It was the opinion of Dante in this *Monarchia* that the Empire was not dependent on the Church; but after his death he was well-nigh condemned for heresy on this account," we have little positive evidence of this charge in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, two works² written to refute the *De Monarchia* being the most important — one by Fra Guido Vernani, the other from St. Antonino, archbishop of Florence, who died in 1409.³

¹ In Solerti, p. 94.

² Cf. Carducci, *Della varia fortuna di Dante*, pp. 272-273.

³ It is possible that there is some allegorical significance in the fact that as Dante and Virgil enter the circle of the heretics in *Inferno*, they at first turn to the right, for the first time in their descent. My own feeling is that the most probable interpretation is that first steps toward a fuller knowledge of the truth may be right, and through some subsequent perversion they enter into the realm of error. Dr. Moore (*Early Biographers*, pp. 160-161) has discussed the question of the exclusion of the heretics from the ethical scheme of the *Inferno* and their absence from the *Purgatorio*.

There are, on the contrary, a considerable number of denials of the justice of this charge which serve as evidence of its existence. Most of these are anecdotic in form and, while rehabilitating Dante's reputation for orthodoxy, take the opportunity to describe the confusion of some cleric through his pious retort.¹ Such is a tale of Lodovico Carbone of Ferrara.²

"Dante Alighieri, the Florentine poet, was exceedingly quick in retort. Being greatly inclined to speculation and contemplation, one day while listening to mass, whether because he was absorbed in some subtle fancy or perhaps with intent to mock his enemies, he did not kneel nor remove his hood when the Host was raised. His enemies—and they were many, for he was a man of most exemplary life—straightway ran to the bishop, accusing Dante of being a heretic and of not having shown due respect for the Sacrament. The bishop summoned Messer Dante and reproving him for his behavior, asked him what he had done when the Host was elevated. 'Verily,' said Dante, 'my mind was so intent on God, that I do not remember what my body was doing, but those vile fellows whose mind and eyes were more on me than on God, can tell you, beyond doubt. And if they had had their mind on God, they would not have been watching what I was doing.' The bishop accepted his excuse and perceived that Dante was a man of wisdom because he revealed the villainy of the envious."

Similar to this is a group of stories, embodying a single idea, although couched in different terms, designed to explain the composition of the *Credo* or *Professione di Fede*. Papanti³ gives three versions and Moore⁴ has still another; one will serve as an illustration of them all.

"After the author, that is Dante, had finished and published his book, and had studied under many famous masters in theology, among others, under Minor Friars, they found in a chapter of the *Paradiso* where Dante pretends that he finds St. Francis, and that St. Francis asks him about this world and how the friars of his order fare, with regard to whom he says he is deeply surprised, since during all the time that he has been in Paradise, not one of them has ever come up nor has he

¹ On the prevalence of this habit of bringing scorn on the clergy, cf. A. Graf, *Miti, leggende e superstizioni del Medio Evo*, Turin, 1893, II, 3 (*La leggenda di un pontefice*).

² *Fuccezie*, ed. cit., No. LXIX, p. 49; also in Papanti, p. 110.

³ Pp. 46-49.

⁴ *Early Biographers*, pp. 158-159.

heard from them. To which Dante answers what is found in that chapter. Now all the friars of the order took great offense at this and laid a plan which was intrusted to their most famous masters, that they should study his book to see if they could find anything in it to warrant his being burned or charged with heresy. In this wise they brought action against him and accused him before the inquisitor of being a heretic who did not believe in God nor observe the articles of faith. He went before the inquisitor and since vespers were already past, he said, 'Give me respite until the morrow and I will give you in writing how I believe in God, and if I am in error, punish me as I deserve.' Thereupon the inquisitor gave him until the third hour in the morning. Dante stayed up all night and gave his answer in the same verse as that in which his book is written, as follows herewith, in which he defines all our faith and all the articles — an excellent and perfect thing for unlettered men and abounding in good and useful examples and prayers to God and to the blessed Virgin Mary — as may be seen, if you will read it. For there is no need to have nor to search other books in order to know all the articles, nor the seven deadly sins, for he defines it all so well and so clearly, that as soon as the inquisitor had read it with his council in the presence of twelve masters in theology, they knew not what to say nor allege against him. Therefore the inquisitor dismissed Dante and made sport of the friars, all of whom marveled how he had been able to write so notable a thing in so short a time."

It is interesting to note that in all of the other versions of the story the accusers are Franciscans, and in the one just quoted a reason for their animosity is given. To be sure, there is no such statement in the *Paradiso* as is there given, but there can be little doubt that the storyteller had in mind the passage in the twelfth Canto, in which St. Bonaventura brands the degeneration of the Franciscans (ll. 112-126). Perhaps some of the good friars, too, had taken offense at the affront to their founder in the victory which the black cherub won over him by his superior logic in the debate for the soul of Guido da Montefeltro (*Inf.* XXVII, 112 ff.). But there was a strong tendency to refute any such prejudiced judgment of him who was popularly called *poeta nostro*, and the *Professione di Fede* itself is only another proof of the eagerness of the following generation to demonstrate that Dante was orthodox.

A curious example of this impulse to defend Dante's name in matters religious is a prayer which he is said to have sung every hour, first printed in a Genoese calendar for 1474 entitled "La raxone de la Pasca: e de la Luna: e le Feste."¹

"Io credo in Dio, e in vita eterna spero,
In santo Spirito, e Gesù di Maria,
Si com' la Chiesa scrive, e canta il vero,
O Padre nostro! che nei cieli stia
Santificato il tuo santo Nome.
Rendiamo grazia di quel che tu sia
Da' oggi a noi la quotidiana manna,
Senza la qual per questo aspro deserto
A retro va chi più di gir s' affanna;
E come noi del mal, che abbiám sofferto,
Perdoniamo a ciascun, e tu perdona
Benigno, e non guardare al nostro merto."

Papanti has pointed out² that this is merely a rude dovetailing of some passages from the *Professione di Fede* and the *Purgatorio*. From the former we have

"Siccome santa Chiesa aperto canta"

and

(l. 24)

"O padre nostro, che ne' cieli stai,
Santificato sia sempre il tuo nome."³

(ll. 211-212)

The last six lines are taken without alteration from the Prayer of the Proud in the *Purgatorio* (XI, 13-18).

Such are some of the attempts to uphold the reputation of Dante against the attacks of the aggrieved clerics. Naturally the pendulum swings in the opposite direction in the ardor of interest until we find such a verse as this, attributed to Dante's son, Pietro:⁴

"O Signor giusto, facciamti preghiero
Che tanta iniquità deggia punire
Di que' che voglion dire
Che 'l mastro della fede fossi errante:
Se fossi spenta, rifariala Dante."

¹ In Papanti, pp. 82-84.

² Loc. cit.

³ These in turn are from "O padre nostro, che ne' cieli stai, . . . Laudato sia il tuo nome" (*Purg.* XI, 1, 4).

⁴ In Trucchi, op. cit., II, 140.

CHAPTER VI

OTHER-WORLD

I. THE APOTHEOSIS

Not only were the enthusiasts prompt to clear Dante's name from the stigma of heresy, but they soon came to see in his *Commedia* the touch of a more than mortal hand. As early as the time of Benvenuto da Imola we have evidence that the popular reader was impressed by the exceptional qualities of his work. Benvenuto, having observed that Dante from a Guelph had become a most pronounced Ghibelline, goes on,¹ "That reminds me of an amusing remark made by one of that party, who, having heard this statement made, said, 'Why, surely he could never have written such a great work if he had not become a Ghibelline.'" If Cacciaguida's advice,

"sì che a te fia bello
Averti fatta parte per te stesso,"
(*Par.* XVII, 68-69)

was not enough of a warrant to place Dante above the pride of parties in the common conception of the next generation, the charge of Beatrice,

"Ritornato di là, fa che tu scrive,
(*Purg.* XXXII, 105)

before long assumed the virtue of the divine commission which Dante certainly meant it to be.

Filippo Villani, before the end of the Trecento, writes,² "I believe that without the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, our poet could not have thought out such a sublime, profound subject, nor reached such heights with the aid of human genius alone, nor have sung so fluently in such chastened speech." Then, after advancing as a proof of this, the marvelous discovery of the last cantos, of which we shall speak presently, he concludes, "Verily by this miracle it will be apparent that the work of the poet is beyond doubt a divine production."

¹ *Comentum*, I, 339; also in Papanti, pp. 36-37.

² In Solerti, pp. 89-90.

An anecdote appended to a fourteenth century manuscript of the *Divina Commedia* will further illustrate this attitude.¹

"This famous poet, Dante, wrote a little book in Latin at the time when the Emperor, Henry of Luxembourg, was crowned in Rome (in the year 1312) by three cardinal legates of the Pope, Clement IV, which book was called, and is still called, the *Monarchia*. The book is divided into three parts, for it proposes and solves three questions or doubts." After an analysis of the book and a jibe at the clergy who have denied its value, the writer continues:

"And I would have the reader note that I, the writer, happening to be at Trapani in Sicily, visited an old man from Pisa, who had the reputation throughout all Sicily of being well versed in the *Commedia* of Dante. In our frequent discussions and conversations about the *Commedia*, this worthy man told me this story. 'I once was in Lombardy and I went to see Messer Francesco Petrarch in Milan. He, in his courteous manner, entertained me for several days. Now one day while I was with him in his study, I asked him if he had the book of Dante. Answering "Yes," he got up and after searching among his books, he found the aforementioned book called the *Monarchia* and threw it down before me. I looked at it and said that that was not what I had meant, but his *Commedia*. Then Messer Francesco was manifestly surprised that I should call the *Commedia* the work of Dante. He questioned me whether I believed that Dante had written that book. And when I said "Yes," he reproved me earnestly, saying that he did not see how that work could have been written by the human intellect without the particular gift of the Holy Spirit, and concluding that the *Monarchia* might properly be said to be Dante's but that the *Commedia* was the Holy Spirit's rather than Dante's. Then he added, "Tell me, for you seem concerned and versed in this *Commedia*; how do you understand the three verses which he places in the *Purgatorio* in the twenty-fourth Canto, where he represents Guido Guinicelli (sic) of Lucca as asking if it were he who said 'Donne che avete intellecto d'amore' and Dante said

'Et io a lui: Io mi sono uno che, quando
Amor mi spira, noto, et in quel modo
Che dicta dentro vo significando'?

¹ In Papanti, pp. 85-87.

Do you not see that he says clearly that when the love of the Holy Spirit inspires his intellect, he notes the inspiration and afterwards reveals it according as the Spirit dictates and points out? desiring to point out that the subtle, profound subjects whereof he treats in this book may not be conceived without the singular favor and gift of the Holy Spirit? ” ” ”

The first part of this story is a close transcript of a passage in Boccaccio's *Vita*¹; for the rest, Carducci has said² that such a tale no doubt originated because of a popular suspicion that Petrarch was not duly reverent to his predecessor, which made men eager to attribute to him an opinion more consonant with their own conviction. The closing words are a repetition of the idea already found in Villani.

Even more extravagant, and bordering on the grotesque, is a tale of Sacchetti's³ concerning Antonio da Ferrara — a whimsical figure of the Trecento, who in his day was looked upon as something of a poet and who has even been suggested as the author of the *Professione di Fede*.⁴

“Master Antonio da Ferrara was a man of stout heart, as well as something of a poet and temperamentally he was somewhat of a buffoon; and he was a man of vicious and sinful life. While he was in Ravenna — at the time when it was in the power of Bernardino da Polenta — it chanced that this Master Antonio, who was much addicted to gambling and one day had staked and lost all that he possessed, almost in despair entered the church of the Minor Friars, where is the tomb of the Florentine poet, Dante. Having observed an ancient Crucifix, half burned and smoked by the numerous candles which were placed about it, and seeing many of them lighted near it at the time, straightway he drew near and picking up all the candles and tapers which were burning there, he went toward Dante's tomb and placed them on it saying, ‘Take these, for thou art more worthy of them than he.’ The people, beholding this, marveled greatly, saying, ‘What does this man?’ And all looked at one another. A steward of the lord of Ravenna who was passing through the church at that time saw this, and on his return to the palace told the lord what he had seen Master Antonio doing. The lord, who, like all men, was interested in such things, informed the Archbishop of Ravenna of what

¹ Pp. 72-73.

² *Della varia fortuna di Dante*, p. 355; cf. also p. 66, n. 1.

³ *Novelle*, ed. cit., No. CXXI, pp. 289 ff.; also in Papanti, pp. 58-61.

⁴ Cf. Carducci, op. cit., p. 309.

Master Antonio had done and bade him summon him before him, as though he were going to bring against him a charge of leaning toward the heretical doctrines of the Paterinians. The Archbishop sent for him without delay and he appeared. When the charge was read to him, that he might offer his defense, he denied not a word but confessed all, saying to the Archbishop, 'If you were to burn me, I would not speak otherwise, for always have I recommended myself to the Crucifix and never has he done me other than evil. Therefore, seeing so much wax set before it that it is half burned (would that it were wholly so!), I took up the lights and placed them on the tomb of Dante, who seemed to me to deserve them more than he. And if you do not believe me, look at the writings of each; you will judge those of Dante to be marvelous beyond nature and human wisdom and you will count the Gospels stupid. And even if there were lofty and marvelous things therein, it is small wonder that he who sees all things and has all things should show part of them in his writings. But the wonderful thing is that a man as insignificant as Dante, not having all things nor even a part of them, has seen all and written all. For this reason, then, he seems to me more worthy of such an array of lights than the other and henceforth I mean to recommend myself to his care. You perform your office and you take your ease, who for love of Him have fled all discomfort and live like sluggards. When you would hear more clearly from me, I will tell you on another occasion, when I have not staked all that I possess.'

"The Archbishop perceived him to be in straits and said: 'Then you have played and lost? You will return again.' Master Antonio replied: 'Would that you and all your likes had lost all that you possess! I would be right merry. Whether I return or no is my affair; and returning or not returning, you shall always find me thus minded or worse.' The Archbishop said: 'Well, depart with God's blessing—or with the devil's. And if I send for you, you will not come here. At least take to your lord some of the fruits that you have given me.' And so he departed.

"The lord, having learned what had happened, was greatly pleased with Master Antonio's arguments and made him a present that he might be able to pay. And for several days he took great delight with him over the candles which were offered to Dante. Afterwards Master Antonio set out for Ferrara—in a better mood. For at the time when Pope Urban V died and a picture of him was set up in a famous church in a

large city, he saw burning before it a huge torch of a candle that must have weighed two pounds, and before the Crucifix which was not far away was a sorry little penny candle. Taking up the torch, he stuck it up before the Crucifix, saying: 'A curse be on us if we would shift and change the realm of heaven as we daily change the earthly realm.' And so he went home. This was as fair and as noteworthy a speech as could have been spoken under such circumstances."

Dante, Christ, and the Pope, then, is the order of Antonio's hierarchy. Ricci¹ has made a study of the facts of the tale and has very plausibly demonstrated their possibility in point of time and temper, if not their actual occurrence. To us the story is of peculiar interest in that Sacchetti represents essentially the bourgeois, the average Italian of the fourteenth century rather than the trained aristocrat. If this may be looked upon as an example of his popular apotheosis, we have a no less striking tribute of homage from the man of letters in the sonnet, long attributed to Boccaccio:²

" Dante Alighieri son, Minerva oscura
D'intelligenza e d'arte, nel cui ingegno
L'eleganza materna aggiunse al segno
Che si tien gran miracol di natura.

L'alta mia fantasia pronta e sicura
Passò il tartareo e poi 'l celeste regno
E 'l nobil mio volume feci degno
Di temporale e spirital lettura.

Fiorenza gloriosa ebbi per madre,
Anzi matrigna a me pietoso figlio,
Colpa di lingue scellerate e ladre.

Ravenna fummi albergo nel mio esiglio
Et ella ha il corpo, e l'alma il sommo Padre,
Presso cui invidia non vince consiglio."

¹ Cf. *Fanfulla della Domenica*, 14 Nov. 1886. I am obliged to accept the reference on the authority of L. di Francia, *Francesco Sacchetti*, Pisa, 1902, p. 132.

² Cf. *Antologia delle opere minori*, ed. Gigli, Florence, 1907, p. 300. Mr. E. H. Wilkins informs me that there is no evidence that this sonnet is Boccaccio's and believes that there is some internal evidence that it is a Renaissance work. Cf. also L. Manicardi & A. F. Massera, *Introduzione al testo critico del Canzoniere di Giovanni Boccacci*, Castelfiorentino, 1901, p. 13, n. 2, and p. 23. It has, however, been generally attributed to Boccaccio, even by Carducci. I have to thank Mr. H. W. L. Dana for calling my attention to this and to other points.

2. FANTASTIC

To enhance the idea of Dante's superhuman powers and virtues one of the most natural methods was the use of the miraculous, the supernatural. Since neither Iris nor the angel Gabriel was engaged in the duties which had once made glad the hearts of men or stricken them with fear, the only recourse was to the allegorical dream. This Boccaccio recognized. His first care was to provide the proper auguries for Dante's birth.¹

Dante's mother, he says, "when pregnant, and not far removed from the time when she should be delivered, saw in a dream of what wondrous kind the fruit of her womb should be; albeit it was not then understood of her nor of any other, though now, because of the event that has come to pass, it is most manifest to all.

"The gentle lady thought in her dream that she was under a most lofty laurel tree, on a green meadow, by the side of a most clear spring, and there she felt herself delivered of a son, who in shortest space, feeding only on the berries which fell from the laurel tree and the waters of the clear spring, her thought grew up into a shepherd, and strove with all his power to have of the leaves of that tree whose fruit had nourished him; and, as he struggled thereto, her thought she saw him fall, and when he rose again, she saw he was no longer a man, but had become a peacock. At the which thing, so great amazement laid hold of her that her sleep broke; and in no long space the due time came for her labor, and she was delivered of a son, whom by common consent with his father, they called by name Dante (the Giver); and rightfully so, because, as will be seen in the sequel, the issue was most perfectly consonant with this name. This was that Dante of whom is the present discourse."²

In the closing chapter of the *Vita*,³ he interprets this dream in what he is pleased to call "a rather superficial manner" (*assai superficialmente*). I will not take the space to quote his interpretation in full, but the gist is this: "The laurel under which the lady thought she gave our Dante to the world signifieth methinks that the disposition of heaven at his birth showed itself such as to indicate magnanimity and poetic eloquence; which two things are shown forth by the laurel, the tree of Phœbus,

¹ *Vita*, p. 10.

² Cf. Benvenuto da Imola, *Comentum*, I, 13-15, for another account based on Boccaccio.

³ *Vita*, pp. 76-82.

wherewith poets are wont to be crowned, as hath been shown at large above. The berries whence the child, when born, was nourished I understand to be the effects produced aforetime by such like disposition of the heavens; to wit, books of poetry and what poets teach . . . The clear spring of which she thought he drank I take to indicate naught else than the exuberance of philosophic teaching, moral and natural . . . His growing straightway into a shepherd signifies the excellence of his wit . . . His striving to possess some of those leaves, the fruit whereof had nourished him, shows forth naught else than the burning longing which he had (as said above) for the laurel crown . . . And whilst he was most ardently longing for these leaves it says that she saw him fall, which fall was no other than that whereby we all fall to rise no more, to wit death; which (if what was said above be borne in mind) came to pass at the moment of his utmost longing for the laurel crown.

"Then it goes on to say that from a shepherd she straightway saw him change into a peacock, by which transformation his after fame may right well be understood, which how far so ever it may rest on his other works yet chiefly liveth in his Comedy, which in my judgment excellently conforms to the peacock, if the characteristics of one and the other be examined. The peacock, as would seem, amongst his other attributes hath four notable ones: the first is that he hath angelic feathers, wherein he hath an hundred eyes; the second is that he hath foul feet and noiseless tread; the third is that he hath a voice right dreadful to hear; the fourth and last is that his flesh is odoriferous and corrupteth not. Now these four things are fully compassed by our poet's *Commedia*."

Proceeding, then, with a minute analysis of the application of these four attributes to the *Divina Commedia* he concludes, "for which thing, and for the others indicated above, it clearly appears that he who was a shepherd when alive hath become a peacock after his death, as we may believe was revealed by divine inspiration in sleep to his dear mother."

In speaking of the charge of licentiousness which Boccaccio brings against Dante, I have had occasion to mention the possible influence of a passage in the life of Virgil, commonly attributed to Suetonius. At the very beginning of that life,¹ we find the following dream story. "His mother while pregnant dreamed that she had brought forth a laurel branch which had no sooner touched the ground than it took root and

¹ Cf. Nettleship, op. cit., p. 9.

sprang up straightway into a full-grown tree, laden with divers fruits and flowers, and on the morrow, as she was betaking herself with her husband to a nearby country-seat, turning aside from the road she brought forth a son in a ditch by the way."

Although Boccaccio makes no mention of Virgil in this connection, several of his imitators compare the dream of Dante's mother with that of Virgil's mother. So Giovanni da Serravalle,¹ having closely copied Boccaccio's version of the former, gives the latter in the very words of the Suetonius form, and attempts to demonstrate by a comparison Dante's superiority to Virgil. And Manetti adds to Boccaccio's account:² "I am readily inclined to believe dreams of this sort to be true, especially in the case of pregnant women whose hour is near, for it is a well-known fact, recorded by authors of merit, that the mothers of Dionysius, tyrant of Syracuse, and of Maro, the most renowned of all our poets, and of certain other famous men have seen strange things in the still of night." He then quotes the dream about the mother of Dionysius directly from Valerius Maximus³ and briefly paraphrases the Suetonius story. Landino,⁴ in his account, also gives the story of the dream of Virgil's mother and further, as analogous, the second of the two dreams of Astyages concerning his daughter Mandané, the mother of Cyrus, as it is recorded in Herodotus.⁵

Of course it is not to be overlooked that Dante has a similar account of prenatal warnings in his story of St. Dominic,

"E come fu creata, fu repleta
Sì la sua mente di viva virtute
Che nella madre lei fece profeta,"
(*Par.* XII, 58-60)

where the reference is to the black and white dog to which she dreamed she had given birth.⁶ And in a passage immediately following he has another suggestive conception, that in which he tells us how Heaven inspired the parents of St. Dominic to name him aright:

"Quinci si mosse spirito a nomarlo
Del possessivo di cui era tutto.
Dominico fu detto" — (ll. 68-70)

¹ Ed. cit., p. 14.

² In Solerti, p. 116.

³ *Facta dictaque memorabilia*, ed. Kempf, Leipzig, 1888, Bk. i, chap. vii, p. 42.

⁴ In Solerti, pp. 186-187.

⁵ Ed. Blakesley, London, 1854, I, 107-108.

⁶ Cf. Scartazzini, *Divina Commedia*, p. 815.

a bit of allegorizing which is distinctly like Boccaccio's explanation of the word "Dante," although the type of explanation is so common that little can be said of any probability of influence. On the whole, considering the fact that the most natural figure with whom to associate Dante's name was Virgil and that the fifteenth century biographers expressly quote the parallel episode from his life, I am inclined to believe that Boccaccio had the Suetonius story in mind when he wrote the account of the dream of Dante's mother.

A dream is also employed by the master of fiction to lend an other-world dedication to the *Divina Commedia*.¹

"It was Dante's wont, whenever he had done six or eight cantos, more or less, to send them from whatever place he was in, before any other had seen them, to Messer Cane della Scala, whom he held in reverence above all other men; and when he had seen them, Dante gave access to them to whoso desired. And having sent to him in this fashion all save the last thirteen cantos, which he had finished but had not yet sent him, it came to pass that, without bearing it in his mind that he was abandoning them, he died. And when they who were left behind, children and disciples, had searched many times, in the course of many months, amongst all his papers, if haply he had composed a conclusion to his work, and could by no means find the remaining cantos, and when every admirer of his in general was enraged that God had not at least lent him to the world so long that he might have had opportunity to finish what little remained of his work, they had abandoned further search in despair since they could by no means find them.

"So Jacopo and Piero, sons of Dante, both of them poets in rhyme, moved thereto by certain of their friends, had taken it into their minds to attempt to supplement the parental work, as far as in them lay, that it might not remain imperfect, when to Jacopo, who was far more zealous than the other in this work, there appeared a wondrous vision, which not only checked his foolish presumption but showed him where were the thirteen cantos which were wanting to this divine *Commedia* and which they had not known to find. A worthy man of Ravenna, whose name was Piero Giardino, long time a disciple of Dante's, related how when eight months had passed after the death of his master, the afore-said Jacopo came to him one night, near to the hour that we call matins,

¹ *Vita*, pp. 68-70; Wicksteed's translation.

and told him that that same night a little before that hour, he, in his sleep, had seen his father Dante approach him, clad in whitest garments, and his face shining with an unwonted light; whom he seemed to ask if he were yet living, and to hear in reply that he was, but in the true life, not in ours. Whereon he seemed further to ask him if he had finished his work or ever he passed to that true life; and, if he had finished it, where was the missing part which they had never been able to find. To this he seemed to hear again in answer, 'Yea! I finished it.' Whereon it seemed that he took him by the hand and led him to that chamber where he was wont to sleep when he was living in this life; and touching a certain spot, he said, 'Here is that which ye so long have sought.' And no sooner was uttered that word than it seemed that both Dante and sleep departed from him at the same moment. Wherefore he averred, that he could not hold but come and signify what he had seen, that they might go together and search in the place indicated to him, which he held most perfectly stamped in his memory, to see whether a true spirit or a false delusion had shown it him. Wherefore, since a great piece of the night still remained, they departed together and went to the place indicated, and there found a mat fixed to the wall, which they lightly raised, and found a recess in the wall which neither of them had ever seen, nor knew that it was there; and there they found certain writings, all mouldy with the damp of the wall, and ready to rot had they stayed there much longer; and when they had carefully removed the mould and read, they saw that they contained the thirteen cantos so long sought by them. Wherefore, in great joy, they copied them out, and, after the author's wont, sent them first to Messer Cane, and then joined them on, as was meet, to the imperfect work. In such manner did the work of many years see its completion."

I think I have spoken before of Filippo Villani's use of this dream as an argument for the divine inspiration of the poem; a concession that is the more curious inasmuch as he brands the story of the dream of Dante's mother as "fabulous." But after all, belief in dreams is in essence a matter of temperament, and it is not incumbent on us to believe that Boccaccio put any great trust in his own stories. For him they are rather an artistic than a didactic device.

Outside of Boccaccio there is little attempt to introduce the supernatural and fantastic as a factor in Dante's life. But there is one

noteworthy example in the *Trattato della vita civile*¹ of Matteo Palmieri, a Florentine of the Quattrocento, who is more widely known as author of the *Cita di vita*, a philosophical poem inspired by St. Augustine's *Civitas dei* and manifestly influenced by the *Divina Commedia*.

"The poet Dante when young and eager for glory, at the time when preparations were being made in the Casentino for a hard battle between the Aretines and the Florentine forces, choosing a faithful comrade, a student of philosophy and one of the most learned men of the time in letters and liberal studies, went out to the Florentine camp. There they stayed a long time, giving helpful advice to the leaders of the army. At last when the day of battle came, and the companies were boldly arrayed on either side, the fight was waged for many hours with doubtful outcome. Finally by favor of fortune the balance of victory swung to the Florentines so that they put all their enemies to flight; and not without bloodshed and death on our side we won a complete victory.

"In this battle Dante put forth his strongest efforts; and so close was the pursuit of the scattered, fleeing enemies that few escaped their victorious hands; and with their onslaught they won Bibbiena and many other strongholds of the country of Arezzo. Engaged in these tasks for two days they departed far from the field of battle. On the third day, returning where the cruel conflict had taken place they found many of their own dead among the enemy. And so the joy of victory was mingled with grief for their lost friends, each one bearing his loss grievously, — one of a relative, another of a friend, — and they consoled and comforted one another, grieving at the fate of those who had departed. After several days, having poured out their hearts to one another, and, now that their grief was in large measure mitigated at the thought of their glorious death, consoled by their victory, they turned their minds to providing for their burial, especially of some of their noblest and most distinguished citizens. While they were thus occupied in finding bodies, Dante had for some time been searching for his dear friend, who had been stripped of mortal life by his wounds. When at last he came where the body lay, torn and wounded as he was — I know not whether resuscitated or dead — he suddenly leaped to his feet before Dante in the semblance of a living being (of so much I am certain by hearsay). Dante seeing him rise contrary to his expectation, full of surprise began to

¹ In Papanti, pp. 98-108.

tremble all over and for some time lost all power of speech, until the wounded man, addressing him, said :

" ' Give heed and dismiss all suspicion, since not without cause am I sent through special grace by a light of the universe only to tell thee what I have beheld in the three days between the two lives. Therefore, give attention and keep in thy memory what I shall say, since it is ordained that through thee my secret vision shall be made known unto the human race. '

" Dante, hearing this, recovered his faculties and throwing off his terror began to speak, saying, ' All thy speech shall be right dear to me, but if it be not displeasing, satisfy me first as to thy condition, that I may understand what grace has preserved thee so mightily these three days, with so many mortal wounds, and without nourishment or sustenance. '

" ' It is grievous to me, ' he replied, ' that I may not satisfy thee wholly in thy questioning ; willingly would I disclose myself to thee, if I might. But take from me what I may give for it is not lawful for me to promise more. '

" ' While our companies were being arrayed, perceiving that the enemy were strong and well stationed, I was seized with such terror, that fearful and timid, I determined in my heart to take flight and to abandon our host. In this intention I persisted until Vieri de' Cerchi, in whom lay the salvation of our army on that day, spurring toward the press of the enemy, cried out, " Let him who would save his country follow me ! " When I heard these words and saw him, who was the richest and most renowned of all our citizens, out of love for his country, rushing into such danger and into almost certain death with his nephew and his own son, I felt so rebuked that I condemned my error within me and recovering courage, instead of being timid, I became one of the bravest and did make resolve to fight with daring and to offer for the salvation of my country my life and all my possessions. So minded, together with many others, I followed the noble and daring Vieri ; and fighting valiantly against the reckless onslaught of the enemy, who nobly defended themselves with the greatest courage, we dealt and received blows and even death for some space of time, until we had victoriously broken the first two lines of the enemy. When now we were exhausted, lo ! Guglielmino, the captain and chief of the hostile side, with a fresh, well-trained company entered the battle with such a rush that the victory in truth was

beginning to incline in their favor, had not I, aroused by our losses, calling on God to save us from our evils, spurred furiously into the thickest of the fray, straight upon Guglielmino, the chief of them all, and — with God's good pleasure — struck him down with a mortal blow. Immediately I was encompassed by all his followers, but for a time I defended myself; at last strength failed my limbs and, pierced through, as you see me, I left me a bloody and well-avenged victory. At this point my knowledge of myself begins to grow shadowy, nor can I well satisfy your question whether I remained in the body or lived outside the body in another. But alive I surely was and I felt hampered by my heavy limbs, as one who cannot help himself when he dreams of danger. And lo! without knowing how, I found myself on the confines of a bright orb, which at first seemed to my eyes to be large beyond measure. This seemed to be so brightly illumined by another's light that it provided light to the whole earth. I, eager to rise to it, was closed within myself nor did my courage avail me, when lo! an old man of reverent authority appeared before my sight, like to an imperial majesty, oftentimes seen depicted by me. When I beheld him, I was all a-tremble; he, taking my right hand said: "Be of good courage and give heed to what I shall tell thee, and keep it in memory." Somewhat restored by his words of comfort, trembling I began, "Excellent Father, if it is lawful for thee and if such a boon is not forbidden me, in mercy be not loath to tell me who thou art, before thou enterest into longer speech." Benignly he replied, "On earth I was named Charlemagne."

" "Full dear a favor is thy sight to me," said I, "oh, holy Emperor," and reverently bowing low, I placed my lips upon his feet; then rising, I continued, "Charles, not only the grandeur and the glory of thy excellent deeds but also the merit of thy many virtues, thy meekness, mercy, supreme justice, and the ordered fashion of all thy words and deeds, aided and adorned by thy learning and study of divine and human letters, are a fitting cause that thou shouldst be called 'Great.' And verily thy fame and glory, as is meet, lasts and shall last forever with the world, known even to the stars. For the Christian faith, thou didst fight against many nations—Spain, Flanders, France, and even in distant Britain and Ireland thou didst conquer and convert to the faith. Then, returning to succor Italy in its misery, hitherto the slave of the barbarians for five hundred years, thou didst liberate it from the hand of Desiderius, putting

an end to the mad fury of the pernicious Lombards. The Supreme Pontiff, insulted and for many years deprived of his dignity, thou didst restore to his sometime honor and pristine state in the Apostolic See. The Empire, deserted for many centuries, thou didst anew raise to dignity and in thee alone lay the salvation of Christendom and by thee a large part of the earth was restored and freed."

"While I was still desirous of continuing, the holy Father interrupted me, saying, "Thy words are superfluous with me and delay that which will make thee content. Give heed and know that thou art in the centre of the universe. All those immeasurable bodies, which diffuse so bright a light above thee and which may be contemplated by elevation of mind, are eternal, and first causes which are preserved immutable. The part which is below thee is mutable and by a necessity imposed upon it by the eternally stable powers continually suffers and varies. This essence, operating by a power which nourishes itself in its own life, generates the first causes, together with the eternal movement of the whole universe. From this are formed all the animals which are on earth, what flies through the air and all the marvels that the ample sea hides within its waves; the fragile body and all the mortal members are from that lower part which I have said is mutable, sustained by the glowing vigor which is diffused in them according to its measure. To men alone is given the mind of these eternal bodies, which, luminous and resplendent, animated by a divine spirit, move in wondrous wise. That which is within us of these lower, corruptible bodies is servile, mortal and common to the beasts; wherefore, if we are subject to earthly passions, in all things we shall be blinded, overcome and conquered; and without regard for uprightness, given over to the delights of the senses, we shall be like beasts. But the spirit of divine nature, which is perforce stable, commands in God's behalf and places laws on the appetites. He who, disobedient, presumes in his own desire and follows his own will, scorns the commandment made by that God to whom belong these heavens and all that thou dost see. Wherefore, as on a servant, unfaithful and rebellious to his law does he close the gates through which I came to thee, nor will he permit him to return into His city. Whence he remains forever in that place where he is most delighted. This place ye on earth and we likewise in heaven call by the same word, 'Hell.' Whenever he encloses souls within the infernal borders, they are in death, for they are removed

from the simple and individual source of their nature. For this reason what ye on earth call life is certain death and only those live who, obedient to God, after they are loosed from their bodily bonds are carried up to these heavens. This great light, to which thou hast risen by thyself, is the moon, which is illumined by another's light, as ye say on earth."

"' At this I assure you that I became dumb with wonder nor ever should I have recognized it, so transformed did it seem from that which we behold from the earth, and in magnitude it surpassed all our measurements. In reverence I did not interrupt and he continued,

"' "This is the border between life and death; above, all is eternal gladness and immortal joy; below, are all the evils, torments and penalties which can be suffered. That is the blind world, wherein are Lethe and Acheron, the Styx, Cocytus and Phlegethon. Down there Rhadamanthus and Minos administer the laws under whose judgment no guilty soul is pardoned. Down there are the vultures who feed on the hearts which never are consumed. That is the place where men starve in the midst of delicate viands; there is the wheel which turns with its sharp, tearing teeth. One by force of chest rolls weights and one, trembling, fears lest the projection of heavy weights, in peril of which he constantly sees himself, may crash upon his head. In short, that is the centre where every torment roasts; Charon leads all and Pluto and Cerberus devour all. The soul, fastened by its bodily fetters, easily falls headlong through the open door into this Hell; the toilsome task is to return upward afterward and to rise to the lofty stars, since one must scale the glowing cliffs by the opposite path. By this path is the first salvation — to restrain the appetites under the control of the mind, that we may not seem to scorn reason, granted to us by God for our salvation. Nothing is done on earth more pleasing to God than loving justice, mercy and piety, qualities which, though valuable in our relations to individuals, are most valuable in our relations to our country. To the saviors of their country the path to Heaven is open, to those everlasting places which thou dost behold from here."

"' At these words I asked with fear and reverence if it was permitted to me to pass through these eternal lights. He answered, "Only the ardent love which made thee, out of devotion to thy country, fight bravely at Campaldino, makes thee worthy of this and to no one does God so liberally command these doors to be opened, as to the governors of

republics, who preserve the throng of citizens, legally gathered together in a union of corporate contentment. This ample love for universal salvation was ever my guide on earth; now in Heaven I am happy with the blest in far greater good; and I still find the virtue which he cultivates among mortals below so pleasing that through this kinship in interest I become his friend; moved by this and seeing that thou wert dead for love of my Florence, which once I restored on earth, I descended to thee to show thee that glory awaits each one who gives heed to this in your life."

"Thus speaking he took us out of a shade, as if a lamp were taken out of a lantern, and I found myself light and free, as a thing without members. Then he started forth and put me behind him in the first of the eternal lights. There he said to me, "Look, while we go, how the universe is bound together by nine orbs; the lowest which is fixed in the midst, as a centre toward which all the surrounding weights fall, must be familiar to thee. See how diminished your earth appears already, and from heaven it will seem to thee almost a point. This, in which we are, is the least of the holy lights, more distant than any other from Heaven and nearer the earth; see how it is lighted and adorned by the rays of the sun. Mercury is next to this and revolves with wonderful speed. Bright Venus is the one which gazes on herself in the third circle about the sun. Behold the sun which in order is placed in the midst of all as the guide and prince of the other lights; illuminating, it fills all things with its brightness, until because it appears alone (*solo*) on earth, among the celestial lights it is called the Sun (*Sole*). This other with the redder glow, which seems horrible, is Mars. Benign and resplendent is the rise to Jupiter, and Saturn is the last which may be reached in Heaven."

"Arrived there, marvelous contemplation seized me; for I saw countless stars never before seen by me on earth, and their greatness was beyond all human conception. The sky appeared adorned with so many varied signs, that in its loveliness it seemed fashioned by some good master of certain purpose. With twice five signs it was marked off in opposite regions. One of these seemed far more flashing with brilliant whiteness than the other and within were flashing lights of blazing flames. Two gates appeared in it in opposite regions, one had the Crab as its sign, the other, in a higher place, the Capricorn. The sun marked its

course as far as these when it reached its highest degree. "Within these gates," said my guide, "are the blest." Then, having warned me that man may not enter the higher gate, he put me in through the gate of the Crab.

"In vain should I tell, if only I could tell, the great and holy company of eternal creatures who dwell in that Heaven in joy without end. But I truly believe that I should speak the truth if I said, that for every man who ever lived in the world there are thousands of heavenly creatures there. There I saw the souls of all the citizens who in this world have governed well their states. Among them I recognized Fabricius, Curtius, Fabius, Scipio and Metellus, and many others who for the salvation of their country counted themselves and their own interests of little weight, but to tell their names would be without profit.

"Charles, with gladsome mien, turning to me said, "Thou canst now see in very truth that men are not mortal, but that it is the flesh which dies in them and that man is not what his form shows. As is the mind, so is the man; for if the mind properly nourishes the soul, it is joined with God and as an eternal thing eternally abides. Nothing in the world is more excellent than training it with good acts in good deeds. No task can be better among men than watching out for the safety of the country, preserving the cities and maintaining the union and harmony of the properly incorporated throngs. Those who practice this virtue beyond all others, in these divine seats, as in their own house, shall live eternally content among the blest, for this is the place to which the saviors of their states on earth have come and to which they are at last to return."

"Dante who harkened with wonderment to all these words wished to reply, 'Since you have made known to me so excellent a reward, I will strive with all diligence to attain it.' But even as he began, the body of his dead friend fell to the ground. Then after he had waited for some time, to see if he would rise again, he provided for his burial and returned to the army."

This fantastic tale, as Dr. Moore has observed,¹ is evidently constructed from a reminiscence of the myth at the end of Plato's *Republic*, respecting Er the son of Armenius, with further details suggested by a familiarity with the *Divina Commedia*. Numerous incidents and turns of phrase

¹ *Early Biographers*, pp. 115 ff.

are fashioned from Dante's own, such as the "old man of reverent authority" who is another Cato ("un veglio degno di tanta riverenza in vista," *Purg.* I, 31-32), or the phrase "by force of chest" ("per forza di poppa," *Inf.* VII, 27), many of which have been gathered together by Dr. Moore. He might well have added, however, that the influence of the *Æneid* is quite as strong, the whole scene of Hell being a paraphrase of the description of Tartarus by the Sibyl.¹

As to Dante's presence at Campaldino, it is now generally accepted, in spite of Bartoli's assertion² that it is a legend, that Dante bore a part in the battle. Lionardo Bruni's account³ has almost the savor of documentary evidence and he even quotes a letter, now lost, in which Dante says,⁴ "Ten years had already passed since the battle of Campaldino, wherein the Ghibelline faction was all but utterly slain and undone, and wherein I found myself, not raw in arms; and wherein I had much dread and at the end the greatest gladness, by reason of the varying chances of that battle." Moreover it is hard not to interpret Dante's own words,

"Io vidi già cavalier mover campo,
E cominciare stormo, e far lor mostra,
E talvolta partir per loro scampo :
Corridor vidi per la terra vostra,
O Aretini, e vidi gir gualdane,
Ferir torneamenti, e correr giostra,"
(*Inf.* XXII, 1-6)

as a vivid personal recollection of the day which broke the hopes of the Ghibelline cause.

Such are the few instances of fantastic events associated with Dante's name. Although they are not essentially different in subject matter from many of the purely popular medieval legends, there is a certain sophistication about their form which makes it impossible to consider them as such. Even if this were not the case, the fact that there is no suggestion of them outside of the few imitators or copiers of Boccaccio would argue against their popular diffusion. However, it is easy to go too far in such an inference and we should do well to avoid the utilization of such negative testimony. That a story is not found in literature is of course no evidence that it did not exist in oral tradition.

¹ Cf. *Æneid*, VI, 562-627. ² *Vita*, p. 93. ³ In Solerti, p. 99. ⁴ *Id.*, p. 100.

3. LEGENDARY

As an instance of the fallacy of following this method of argument, we may cite a story of Dante which is said to be still current in Florence.

"LO SPIRITO DI DANTE ALIGHIERI"¹

"When anyone is passionately fond of poetry, he should sit by night on the *panchina* (curbing) in the Piazza di Santa Croce or in other places and, having read his poetry, pronounce the following :

' Dante, che eri
 La gran poeta,
 Siei morto, ma vero,
 Il tuo spirito
 E sempre rimasto,
 Sempre per nostro
 Nostro aiuto.

 Ti chiamo, ti prego!
 E ti scongiuro
 A voler aiutarmi.
 Questa poesia
 Voglio imparare;
 Di più ancora,
 Non voglio soltanto
 Imparar la a cantare,
 Ma voglio imparare
 Di mi testa
 Poter le scrivere,
 E così venire
 Un bravo poeta.'

"And then a form of a man will approach from around the statue, advancing gently to the causeway, and will sit on it like any ordinary person, and begin to read the book, and the young man who has invoked the poet will not fail to obtain his wish. And the one who has come from the statue is no other indeed than Dante himself.

"And it is said that if in any public place of resort or inn, any poet sings the poems of Dante, he is always present among those who listen, appearing as a gentleman or poor man, according to the place.

¹ C. G. Leland, *Legends of Florence*, New York, 1895, 1st series, pp. 63-64.

"Thus the spirit of Dante enters everywhere without being seen.

"If his poems be in the house of any person who takes no pleasure in them, the spirit of the poet torments him in dreams until the works are taken away."

This legend — for it certainly may properly be so called — must have been handed down from century to century, and yet there is not the least trace of it in the literature of the earlier centuries. And there is little doubt that around many places in Florence, for that matter in the rest of Italy, such as the so-called "Sasso di Dante" already mentioned,¹ or the house in Gubbio² where he is said to have rested, there has been an unbroken tradition of local interest orally preserved from generation to generation.

Whatever interest such legendary remains may have for us, the Dante whom they trace is a colorless, indefinable figure, quite different from the man who lived in the memory of the first centuries after his death. For them he was the pilgrim, wandering from court to court, looking down with calm disdain alike on princes and on buffoons, distraught with the high concerns of the spheres beyond this present; for them he was the divinely inspired poet of the *Divina Commedia*. To-day their garrulous tales and keen anecdotes still fashion the man — sensitive, reserved, scornful — a man not unworthy to travel in man's behalf

"Giù per lo mondo senza fine amaro,
E per lo monte, del cui bel cacume
Gli occhi della mia Donna mi levarò,
E poscia per lo ciel di lume in lume."

¹ Cf. p. 33.

² Cf. Pelli, *Memorie per servire alla vita di Dante Alighieri*, 2d ed., Florence, 1823, p. 136.

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